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e. Administrative shortcomings of the civil service under Diem.

f. Unreadiness of the Vietnamese armed forces to meet a guerrilla challenge in terms of organization, training, or orientation-- and indeed, strong limitations in terms of leadership and morale on its ability to act effectively against any challenge.

g. Growing pessimism, both in the people, the bureaucratic/military structure, and the high leadership in Vietnam about the ability of the regime to withstand the communist challenge, reflecting both doubts on the competence and leadership of the Diem government, and increasingly in 1960 and 1961 (partly because of U.S. policy in Laos) doubts on the determination of the U.S. to prevent a communist takeover.

In short, the U.S. policy, as described above, had failed to deter a renewed communist drive to take over South Vietnam, and had failed to create a regime in South Vietnam with sufficient political support, military/policy strength, or political/administrative competence to confront that challenge confidently. As in 1954 just before Geneva, again in 1955, and 10 years later in late 1964, Ho Chi Minh had reason for confidence in the early fulfillment of his hopes formed in the 1920's for a united, Communist Vietnam: whether achieved directly or via a period of chaos or a weak neutralist regime. Virtually no one within the U.S. Government argued in 1961 that a continuation of current U.S.

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policy in all its aspects would reliably block this communist ambition: that is, would sustain past U.S. goals. All recognized as the issue: whether to modify those goals, or to change the direction and scale of U.S. efforts.

Among the separate matters raised for decision in this context were:

a. U.S. stakes in the conflict in South Vietnam, and their relative importance in worldwide and domestic political terms: The strategic and symbolic significance of South Vietnam to the defense and political evolution of Southeast Asia; the importance of denying Southeast Asia as a whole to communist influence or rule; the symbolic and political impact of U.S. policy and its degree of success in Southeast Asia on our allies and adversaries outside the area. By late 1961, these matters required renewed reexamination in the light of a U.S. policy in Laos aimed increasingly toward the neutralization of Laos by political settlement.

b. Policy towards Diem: Whether to continue to back Diem exclusively, or to by-pass him, or encourage alternatives; whether to continue to rely upon official persuasion to influence him, to enhance personal influence upon him by sending out U.S. representatives (who might be personally effective), or increasingly to use leverage, pressures and threats to broaden the regime, decentralize command, change military and civil policies and reform administration.

c. The U.S. role with respect to the government and the insurgency: Whether to continue as advisors and providers of financial and logistic aid, to use leverage more actively on operational decisions, to provide more direct combat support, or to move toward partnership or even take-over in military and some civil decision-making.

d. The relative importance of political vs. military factors in stabilizing the regime and countering the insurgency: What political changes and reforms, if any, were highly important or essential to (1) stability of the regime, (2) the effectiveness of the regime in carrying out civil and military programs, or (3) shifting the balance of popular support in the countryside away from the guerrillas and toward the government; what was the likelihood of achieving such changes and reforms, under the Diem regime, by given means, or by any means; if change was infeasible under Diem, what did this imply for U.S. policy with respect to Diem and with respect to South Vietnam; and how far could military or other approaches compensate for the lack of such political development. Related to such questions was the issue of relative importance in determining and controlling U.S. policy of the State Department vs. the Department of Defense in Washington and of the Ambassador vs. the Chief U.S. Military Representative in Saigon.

e. The possible use of U.S. combat forces: What their role and aims might be; how and where they might be employed; how many were needed immediately; how many might be called for ultimately; and what negative effects might result from introducing them.

f. The relation of Laos policy to Vietnam: How seriously to take the infiltration threat; the impact upon infiltration and confidence and morale within South Vietnam of various political solutions or forms of partition within Laos; the need for and prospects of using U.S. troops within Laos to prevent communist takeover or to block infiltration; the feasibility of handling Laos, South Vietnam, and Thailand as separate policy problems.

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In the discussion below of the way the U.S. decision-making process worked in 1961 to resolve these issues, the following themes seem to deserve emphasis:

(1) The impact of Presidential policy with respect to Laos -- as it emerged in the late spring of 1961 -- upon the Presidential programs for Vietnam in May 1961 and, particularly, in November 1961: both in the strength of the enhanced commitment, its nature and timing, and in the limitations imposed upon our involvement.

(2) The gradual downgrading of the importance and feasibility of political reforms aimed at broadening support for the Diem regime; the reduction of U.S. pressures for such reforms, in favor primarily of U.S. military support and a predominantly military Diemist strategy against the insurgency.

(3) The decision to continue to back Diem unreservedly; to work to restore Diem's confidence in U.S. backing and resolve; and to soft-pedal the use of leverage pressure or insistence on "partnership" at top levels, in favor of increased U.S. advisory presence at lower levels, with some hope of bypassing Saigon in supporting and influencing subordinate Vietnamese elements.

(4) The decision to treat Laos and South Vietnam essentially as separate problems, justifying disparate and somewhat conflicting policies.

(5) The ultimate discrepancies between the Presidential policy emerging in November and December 1961 and the policies recommended by high-level advisors either in State or Defense Departments. In effect, the President reasserted U.S. commitment to pre-existing aims, and considerably increased U.S. involvement by increasing advisors and combat support, while

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The purpose of this study is not only to tell what happened but to help explain why it happened; not only to describe a sequence of decisions but to help understand why these particular choices, and not others, were made, and (in order to draw lessons for the future) how things might have been otherwise. Answers to these questions must be more complicated and tentative than to the question, "What decision was taken at a particular time," or even, "How was the problem seen by particular decision-makers?"

The purpose of looking at some earlier perceptions of the problems of South Vietnam, as reflected in Intelligence Estimates, is to address the particular questions: To what extent were the elements of the problem confronting U.S. policy in 1961 foreseen earlier? To what extent were they new, unforeseen, or in some sense unforeseeable? To what extent, on the contrary, were they old problems that had been faced, successfully or not, in the past, or were new problems whose emergence had long been foretold? What follows is a highly selective citation from the Intelligence Estimates of the 1950's, not intended to give a connected account of events or decisions during that period, but to reveal the continuity of certain problems and uncertainties that persisted to 1961, and indeed, ~~the~~ large measure persists today.

The Background to 1961: the challenge to U.S. aims in Vietnam as seen in National Intelligence Estimates, 1950 - 1961.

From 1954 to 1961, U.S. aid to the GVN was encouraged partly by perceived differences in the political environment of Vietnam from the situation under the French from 1946 - 1954. Yet in retrospect, U.S. aid and policy failed during that period, and was again to fail after 1961, in large part because similarities to the earlier situation proved to be more fundamental and more critical than the differences.

This outcome of U.S. efforts was seen most clearly as a possibility in 1961 by those (e.g., JFK, Dean Rusk and William Bundy) who had had some personal contact with Indochina and U.S. policy in the earlier period. Thus, as background to the overall problem as perceived by decision makers in 1961, it is useful to begin by sketching the nature of the Indochinese political problem as it was seen in the 1950-54 and 1954-61 periods. For it is a tentative thesis of this study that it was those political elements which the several periods shared that were, in the end, prime determining factors for failure in each case. Moreover, at least as good a case can be made that the same factors were once again of vital importance in the early post-Diem years and they can still be discerned today. Their future significance may well be inferrable from the past.

The recurrent elements of the pattern that was to confront the U.S. for most of the next two decades could be noted in NIE-5 of

December 29, 1950. This began: "The French position in Indochina is critically in danger by the Viet Minh, a communist movement that has exploited

is a big difference between the American and the French situation. Whatever the French do, short of complete withdrawal is taken by the Vietnamese as basically motivated by colonialist aims. - While American idealism is questioned by a segment of Vietnamese opinion, but no Vietnamese doubt that anti-communism is the main American motive.

*Buy time!
No accident!*

native nationalism." Under the circumstances prevailing, "there is only a slight chance that the French can maintain their military position long enough to build up an independent Vietnamese government and an effective national army which might win the support of non-communist nationalists, and, in conjunction with French forces, contain the Viet Minh." Despite French efforts to weaken the political, nationalistic base of the Viet Minh by supporting "a semi-autonomous pro-French government under native leadership,...concessions to nationalistic sentiment leading to full sovereignty for the Bao Dai government have been forthcoming so slowly and with such seeming reluctance on the part of the French, that the Bao Dai government has not in fact won a strong nationalistic following in any quarter. As a result the French so far have been unable to undermine the political strength of the Viet Minh."

Meanwhile, however, purely military pressure from the Viet Minh, assisted by the Chinese Communists, posed a short run threat of pushing the French from Tonkin and ultimately from all of Vietnam; without a strengthening of the French military position, defeat seemed inevitable even if the French and the Bao Dai government should begin to transform the political situation, for the latter development, essential to victory, could not be effective in time to avert military defeat.

The NIE concluded that if Chinese Communist aid continued and French strength and military resources were not substantially increased above those presently programmed, "the Viet Minh probably can drive the French out of North Vietnam (Tonkin) within 6 to 9 months" (p.1).

But half a year later, an NIE of 7 August 1951 (NIE-35, pp. 1-2), reported "The present military situation in Indochina is one of stalemate."* General de Lattre de Tassigny had repulsed the Viet Minh regime's drive to conquer Tonkin, this "success" resulting from a number of factors including (along with French reinforcement and Viet Minh mistakes in larger scale warfare) "the timely arrival of U.S. military aid, including aircraft, napalm bombs, patrol and landing craft, and ground combat materiel," which had helped de Lattre "to inflict heavy losses on the Viet Minh... Political developments, however, have been less favorable..."

In other words, the French and Bao Dai had not, and were not about to, use the time thus purchased -- by averting military defeat with U.S. military aid -- to create the political developments that were prerequisite to breaking through stalemate towards victory.

"....Despite the gradual French transfer of certain responsibilities, the Vietnamese government has been slow to develop and has continued to suffer from a lack of strong leadership. It has had to contend with: (a) French reluctance to relinquish ultimate control of political and economic affairs; (b) lingering Vietnamese suspicion of any French-supported regime, combined with the apathetic and "fence-sitting" attitude of the bulk of the people, which has deprived the government of broad-based popular support; (c) the difficulty common to all new and inexperienced governments, of training the necessary personnel and building an efficient administration; and (d) the failure of factional and sectional groups to unite in a concerted national effort.

"In January 1951 the opportunity arose of forming a broad-based cabinet representing most non-Communist group in Vietnam; instead Premier Huu formed a cabinet composed primarily of members of his own pro-French faction. Although Huu has displayed some administrative skill and his government has gained slowly in effectiveness, the weakness of the Huu cabinet and its alleged 'French puppet' status have limited its appeal to Vietnamese nationalism and have alienated strong nationalist groups, including the powerful Dai Viet group in Tonkin. Communist control of much of the country and Viet Minh infiltration of large areas under nominal French control have also discouraged many people from openly allying themselves with the government."

* In all following citations, italics are added, unless otherwise noted.

There had been more progress in efforts to create a national Vietnamese army, "an essential prerequisite to growth in the political stature of the Vietnamese government and to ultimate non-communist solution in Indochina," but "progress in the formation of the Army is retarded by lack of capable officers at all levels of command, shortages of equipment, and the apathetic attitude of the populace." (Weaknesses in officers -- in large part the policy of officer recruitment and promotion -- have fatally weakened Vietnamese Army operations ever since.) In the end, the French were not to build the Vietnamese Army or to allow it the role or status to make it an effective symbol of nationalism.

On the communist side, the estimate noted that: "The communist party role has been strengthened, with strict party liners coming more into the foreground...in the absence of further military victories, Viet Minh popular support appears unlikely to increase...while we are unable to determine whether the Viet Minh is actually losing any of its popular appeal, the regime apparently is dependent more and more on tightened communist controls." (The outcome for the Viet Minh in 1954, three years after they began to suffer "heavy losses," after the denial of victory in 1950, after a series of military defeats, increasingly open control by Communist Party members and increasing dependence on coercion and tightened communist controls, is a warning against drawing excessive or premature encouragement from similar developments in the Viet Cong today. For one thing, the effectiveness of the controls in meeting the needs of the communists must be taken into account. As the NIE in 1951 noted, "these

tightened controls may prevent defections and facilitate the exploitation of people already under Viet Minh control.")

Two years later, NIE-91 of 4 June 1953 continued to emphasize the critical problems of lack of support for the Bao Dai regime and lack of Indochinese will and ability to resist the Viet Minh. Some political progress could be pointed to during the preceding year, including local elections in secure areas and decisions in March 1953 to increase the size of the Vietnamese National Army; and, a note that reads familiarly nearly fifteen years later:

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P However:
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The point of similarity here with the problems of the Diem regime and the regimes that followed is not the reasons ~~for~~ why popular support was withheld--the fundamental suspicion of French motives was not, of course, a factor in the later periods--but the fact that Diem and his successors had great difficulty, like Bao Dai though in part for different reasons, in enlisting the sympathies or active support of major non-Communist factions or the mass of Vietnamese citizens in the struggle against the Communists. And the effects of this fact were the same even if its origins were different: inability of the GVN/to mobilize sufficient resources, ~~energy~~ population, and dedicated leadership on its behalf to defeat the Communist movement, which for its part did mobilize--
i.e., organize the active participation of--sufficient peasant population, using nationalist appeals, coercion, persuasion, and organization, to grow in strength and operate effectively in the face of forces initially far stronger.

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"Another Vietnamese program, undertaken with U.S. economic assistance, which involves the relocation of scattered villages in the delta into centralized and defensible sites may be an important step toward the eventual 'pacification' of heavily infiltrated areas."

However,

"Despite these advances, Vietnam still lacks the degree of political strength essential for the mobilization of the country's resources. Tam's 'action' program remains more shadow than substance. Elected local councils have no real power, promised land reform and other social and economic reforms which might generate popular support have not left the planning stage, and the Vietnamese government is handicapped by incompetent cabinet ministers and the lack of competent administrators. While Bao Dai refuses to assume active direction of the affairs of state, he remains hostile toward new leadership and democratic activities."

"Of more basic importance in the failure of Vietnamese to rally to the Vietnamese government following the French grant of independence within the French Union in 1949 have been the following:

a. Many Vietnamese doubt the ability of French Union forces to defeat the Viet Minh and prefer to remain apart from the struggle.

b. The French Government had not dared to promise complete national independence at some future date, as demanded by the Vietnamese, because of the fear that the French national assembly would then refuse to support a war in a 'lost' portion of the French Union.

c. The Vietnamese, despite many evolutionary steps toward complete independence since 1949, are generally inclined to believe that the French intend to retain effective control over the affairs of Vietnam.

d. The nationalist appeal and military prestige of the Viet Minh remains strong among significant numbers of the Vietnamese."

It was not estimated that the DRV would exercise its capabilities for instituting such large scale guerrilla action within South Vietnam during the next year or so. Nevertheless, Diem, increasingly master in his house over the non-communist elements, was still waiting for the other shoe to drop: for the axe to fall. Yet, ~~not~~ unforeseen success in dealing with his short-run, non-communist challenges launched a period of increasing hope that he would be able to meet even a later confrontation with the communists.

"....Diem's success in by-passing the July 1956 election date without evoking large scale Communist military reaction will reassure many Vietnamese and encourage them to cooperate with GVN programs to expose and root out Communists. Continued improvement in internal security will depend in some measure on the government's ability to deal with economic and social problems and on the effectiveness of the administrative apparatus.

"If the Communists were to undertake large scale guerrilla action in South Vietnam, they probably would not be able to develop widespread popular support, especially if the VNA were to register some early military success. The GVN is being increasingly accepted as a nationalist alternative to Communist leadership. Public confidence in the GVN, combined with general war-weariness, may have already reached the point where any effort to upset the government by force would lead to a strong popular reaction against the guerrillas. (Ibid., p. 14)

The most comprehensive consideration

This assessment came close to being a high-water mark in optimism concerning Diem's ability to meet his dual challenges, both short and long run. Yet, political trends were well in motion that could restore the threat of the non-communist opposition.

"....The trend toward authoritarian rule through the political parties led by Diem's relatives and small circle of trusted associates will probably continue. Isolation and neutralization of government critics and men disliked or distrusted by Diem will also continue. Diem and his associates are likely to exert strong pressures against any opposition in the Assembly. Thus it is not likely that Diem or his government will meet any serious opposition in the National Assembly during the period of this estimate; however, over a longer period the accumulation of grievances among various groups and individuals may lead to development of a national opposition movement....

(Ibid., p. 14)

~~This period of optimism was coming to its close by the estimate of~~

26 May 1959. On the eve of the long-awaited renewal of the communist challenge in the south, NIE 63-59, 26 May 1959, summed up Diem's political style:

"President Diem continues to be the undisputed ruler of South Vietnam; all important and many minor decisions are referred to him. Although he professes to believe in representative government and democracy, Diem is convinced that the Vietnamese are not ready for such a political system and that he must rule with a firm hand, at least so long as national security is threatened. He also believes that the country cannot afford a political opposition which could obstruct or dilute the government's efforts to establish a strong and secure state. Although respected for his courage, dedication, and integrity, Diem has remained a somewhat austere and remote

so true

figure to most Vietnamese and has not generated widespread popular enthusiasm.

*Can this be
not happening
now and
in the future*

"Diem's regime reflects his ideas. A facade of representative government is maintained, but the government is in fact essentially authoritarian. The legislative powers of the National Assembly are strictly circumscribed; the judiciary is undeveloped and subordinate to the executive; and the members of the executive branch are little more than the personal agents of Diem. No organized opposition, loyal or otherwise, is tolerated, and critics of the regime are often repressed. This highly centralized regime has provided resolute and stable direction to national affairs, but it has alienated many of the country's educated elite and has inhibited the growth of governmental and political institutions which could carry on in Diem's absence. The exercise of power and responsibility is limited to Diem and a very small circle mainly composed of his relatives, the most important being his brothers Nhu and Can...." (NIE 63-59, 26 May 1959, p.

Despite the lack of popular enthusiasm "there appears to be little identifiable public unrest....The growth of dissatisfaction is inhibited by South Vietnam's continued high standard of living relative to that of its neighbors, the paternalistic attitude of Diem's government towards the people and the lack of any feasible alternative to the present regime." (Ibid., pp. 3-4)

But this highly

"Basic economic development is also inhibited by the GVN's preoccupation with South Vietnam's problems of internal security and military preparedness. It continues to regard programs for long-range economic growth as of lower priority than the building

of defense strength. Moreover, for political reasons, it is reluctant to take any measures which might reduce the country's relatively high standard of living. Consequently, the GVN devotes only a small part of available resources to long-range economic development...."

"....A significant cutback in the standard of living would probably create serious political problems for the government...."

(Ibid, p. 5)

~~By this time,~~ The short term communist threat was described in low key. It was estimated that there were about 2,000 active guerrillas, with "probably several thousand others, now inactive, who have access to arms and would participate in guerrilla activities if so ordered." But it was noted that:

"....They have recently stepped up their intimidation campaign, assassinating local officials in remote areas, terrorizing local populations and disrupting government operations...."

(Ibid, p. 4)

And, finally:

"The prospects for continued political stability in South Vietnam depend heavily upon President Diem and his ability to maintain firm control of the army and police. The regime's efforts to assure internal security and its belief that an authoritarian government is necessary to handle the country's problems will result in a continued repression of potential opposition elements. This policy of repression will inhibit the growth of popularity of the regime, and we believe that dissension will grow, particularly among

those who are politically conscious. The power and unscrupulousness of the Can Lao, if unchecked, will probably prejudice the prestige of the govern_____ (page 7 missing)

(Ibid, p. 6). (underlining added).

"The internal security forces will not be able to eradicate DRV supported guerrilla or subversive activity in the foreseeable future." (underlining added). (Ibid., p. 1)

In the month of this estimate, May 1959, the Lao Dong party of North Vietnam passed a resolution that:

" _____ "

The sharp upsurge in communist incidents started four months later in September 1959.

NIE 14 May 1957: Prospects for North Vietnam

The DRV continues to maintain its apparatus for subversion within SVN and has the capability to infiltrate fairly large numbers of military and political personnel into SVN. Although the Communists in the South have been largely quiescent, some trained military personnel remain, loosely organized in small units that presumably could be reactivated for missions of assassination, sabotage, or limited guerrilla activity.

Because the country-wide elections envisaged by the Geneva Agreements have not been held and because military action has been prevented, the DRV has been frustrated in its hopes of gaining control of SVN. This has caused some discontent among cadres evacuated from the South in the expectation that they would soon return. Unification of the country remains a principal objective of the DRV regime,...

The DRV will probably continue for the next year or two to restrict its campaign for reunification to "peaceful" means. However, the DRV will continue its efforts to infiltrate and to subvert official and nonofficial organizations and to exploit dissident and dissatisfied groups in SVN. It would probably not use its paramilitary forces in SVN to initiate widespread guerrilla activity unless it estimated that the situation in SVN had so deteriorated that such action could overthrow the government.

((This would jibe with the DRV'S decision to turn on the heat just after the November 1960 coup. What is the standard official explanation of the ~~late~~ timing of the DRV decision?))

An estimate dealing with North Vietnam in May 1957 (NIE _____, 14 May 1957), suggested that the timing on the eventual use of the continued communist capability for terrorism and guerrilla war within South Vietnam would probably depend upon the ^{return} ~~rez~~ of political instabilities comparable to those of the 1954-1956 (and they were not foreseen for the next year or two).

As recently as May 28, 1958, an OCB Report on U.S. policy in mainland Southeast Asia drew attention both to an increase in communist subversive and terrorist pressures against the Diem regime, and to the factors in Diem's political style that could limit the ability of his regime to meet renewed challenge:

"Political and Security Problems of the Diem Government.

President Ngo Dinh Diem's policy of strict control in the political and economic fields has caused a certain amount of internal dissatisfaction. Should the President's exercise of personal authority develop too far that may be danger that the resultant frustration of government officials might _____ the united support for his regime which the situation requires. Otherwise, the President's stern police measures and his emphasis on internal security have led to some criticism of the government. This emphasis on internal security stems from the recent emergence of the country, ~~emerge~~ ? dis? continuation of communist-inspired violence and subversion, and such _____ as the assassination of local ~~rx~~ officials in rural areas of southern Viet-Nam."

3 (p. 15).

Half a year later, on January^{7,} 1959, a similar OCB Report asserted:

"Internal Security. It has become increasingly clear that the communists, no longer expectant that Free Viet-Nam will fall to their control through peaceful methods, are executing a carefully planned campaign of violence aimed at undermining the stability of the Diem Government. Their concentration of activities in rural areas where communications and terrain make it difficult for the government to cope with them recalls the tactics used against the French during the Indochina War. Assassinations, particularly of officials in rural areas, continue at an alarming rate of about fifteen to thirty-five a month. Attacks on rubber plantations and reported communist plans to break up the land development, land reform and agricultural credit programs indicate deliberate efforts to interfere with Viet-Nam's economic programs."

Insert B

As late as April 2, 1958 a basic NSC paper stating U.S. policy in mainland Southeast made the comment: "It is only a cease-fire in Vietnam" (NSC 5809), and reiterated U.S. objectives with respect to Vietnam, including "work toward the weakening of the Communists of north and south Vietnam in order to bring about the eventual peaceful reunification of a free and independent Vietnam under anti-Communist leadership."

Let us sum up certain themes of the intelligence estimates between 1950 and 1960 that are relevant to the problems that emerged in 1960-61. Throughout this period the emergency^e of organized, guerrilla action, based upon a stay-behind apparatus remaining from the first Indochinese War and fed by infiltration from the north, ^{was expected} if -- as in fact happened -- the Communists should be denied a victory in SVN by political means. Yet, the viability of an anti-communist regime was seen as a complex problem in which non-communist opposition was, in the earlier period, an even more immediate threat than communist pressures. The very characteristics of stubbornness, self-confidence, and reliance upon his family that were factors of strength enabling Diem to dominate the fractionated, loosely organized, elements of the non-communist opposition were earlier seen as possibly limiting his ability to achieve the positive loyalty and active, dedicated participation of factions, cadres, and population that would probably be essential in confronting the eventual, much more powerful challenge of the communists. Thus, on the basis of these estimates, Diem's victory in establishing his personal authority in the face of

short run, non-communist challenges provided some hope but far from a conclusive essence for expecting that his regime would be equally successful in combatting a coordinated communist-led campaign if and when Communist leadership should decide to launch one.

For most of this period, the estimates were consistently pessimistic on this score, and later events would seem to bear out their appreciation of the problem as a very difficult one that Diem probably would not be able to solve. The elements in Diem's personality and style of administration that were frequent cause of complaint and worry from 1961-63 had in fact been clearly evident and recognized since the mid-50's, which is enough to suggest that they were unlikely to change spontaneously or under mere persuasion and personal influence. The questions that remained were: Were these limitations on Diem's ability to attract popular support or wield governmental instruments effectively, in fact, as critical in the fight against the communists as earlier estimates had guessed they would be? If so, might new methods of U.S. influence, such as more forceful use of US leverage or a more massive U.S. presence to try to change them or compensate for them?

Insert, p. 7.

Thus, the pressures for commitment. They began to operate in April 1961 as soon as the basic Presidential decisions on a policy for Laos had been reached. Whatever the President's state of thinking about the security problems presented by SEA as a whole at that time -- and neither the available documents nor recent biographies are conclusive on this -- the President was certainly in no mind to write off U.S. interests in SEA, either publicly or within the councils of the Government. It was therefore essential at that time to adopt a stance that the problems of SVN and Laos were separable, and justified disparate goals and strategies, despite the fact that the absence of U.S. or other strong SEATO forces in the pan handle of Laos opened the prospect of increased infiltration into SVN. All the doubts and pressures that were to arise later could be foreseen as early as April, and led Kennedy to counter then with a program of increased U.S. aid and a trip by Vice President Johnson to Asia with the major purpose of reassuring these allies and, specifically Diem, of continued U.S. interest and resolve despite the apparent counter evidence of our Laos policy. The reaffirmation of policy and the Vice President's (acting under guidance) fullsome private and public endorsement/of Diem's leadership in Vietnam, of course, increased the likelihood that later requests for help from Diem would be made positively. But, although the DA, followed by the JCS, proposed in April and May that U.S. combat forces be deployed in SVN, both for psychological and operational effect, Diem still took, at the time of the Vice President's visit, the position that such forces were unneeded and would be politically counter productive. What changed in

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the course of the summer was less a worsening of the security situation within SVN as a weakening Vietnamese confidence in the assurances that the Vice President had carried, this as a result of events in Laos, where negotiations were showing little progress and the Pathet Lao were improving their position without provoking the U.S. into breaking off negotiations and _____ them with troops.

The first strong indication of the impact this was having in Saigon was an unforeseen and unprecedented request by Diem for a bilateral defense treaty with the U.S. (contravening the Geneva Agreements of 1954).

At the same time the events in Laos were generating strong pressures within DOD and in State/Defense working groups, for the implementation of SEATO plans or of unilateral U.S. deployments into LAOS; i.e., abandonment of the negotiated program. Such a deployment was presented by the JCS as the only adequate means of addressing the security problem of SEA as a whole. U.S. actions within SVN alone were described by the JCS as distinctly supplementary, or second best, to preventive action within Laos ^{and} to physical security not only of Laos but of Vietnam, Thailand and ultimately ^{Burma} ~~Laos~~, Cambodia and Malaysia. However, a concept was developed and endorsed by the JCS, with some White House and State backing, for intervention by U.S. combat forces in Vietnam alone. This was regarded as primarily, at the outset, a psychological measure defined to reassure the Vietnamese and it was an effective Vietnamese effort with a clearly implied commitment to follow the initial deployment with further U.S. forces if the Vietnamese effort should be inadequate, particularly in the face of increased infiltration from Laos. Although this was not regarded as a substitute for action within Laos itself, it is recommended as an interim measure pending resolution of U.S. policy in Laos (i.e.,

pending either acceptable success of negotiations or the unequivocal failure of the negotiation strategy to avoid takeover (regarded as far more likely) and as ~~unfavorable~~, to some degree, the costs of an unfavorable settlement within Laos and the resulting infiltration.

~~During~~ this strong skepticism within the Defense establishment on the wisdom of viability of his course in Laos, the President was thus in no position to broaden the controversy by appearing to be resistant to the security needs of SVN as well, especially in advance of an immediate costly challenge; just as in April and May he could limit resistance to an externally unpopular approach to Laos only by limiting the evident scope of that policy within SEA. In short, even if he had been very strongly dubious of the necessity, warrant, or feasibility of successful defense of SVN against Communist tactics -- and it is not suggested here that his state of mind was this extreme -- the fall of 1961 would have been a peculiarly hard time for him to express his doubts in action.

In this setting of pressure from within his own bureaucracy to send combat troops to Laos and/at least to Vietnam, came Diem's plea for a bilateral defense treaty: a plea delivered in a month which the Chief of the MAAG in Saigon described as "near panicky" relating it explicitly to developments in Laos. Just before the Taylor mission met with _____ in Saigon, Diem's Minister of Defense presented the U.S. Ambassador with a request for U.S. combat forces. Although in his first meeting with Taylor, Diem surprised the party by now bringing this up, it had just been related to them, Diem's response at a later meeting to the _____ of U.S. forces was _____ by Taylor ~~in~~ his own suggestion was strongly _____. Moreover, he announced that he had been canvassing Vietnamese

opinion and had found virtual unanimity even "within members of the opposition" on the desirability of U.S. forces. This unanimity of Vietnamese opinion was confirmed by U.S. mission report which again explicitly related the request in nearly every case of the need to reassure the Vietnamese whose doubts had been raised by Laos policy and developments.

To what amounted to a request from Diem for U.S. combat forces, Taylor added his own endorsement of the proposal which it had been a major part of his mission to assess. The basic reason for the necessity was stated promptly in the opening lines of Taylor's report:

"There was a crisis of confidence in Vietnam brought on by U.S. policy in Laos." [Check for exact wording.] , or, as stated in the opening sentence of a section headed "The Crisis in SVN":

"The principal elements involved in this crisis are clear enough:

(1) uncertainty that the seriousness of the American commitment to defend SVN induced by the Laos negotiations. Many people believe that the U.S. will be prepared to settle for a Souvanna in Saigon." The requests from Diem were, in themselves, a strong evidence for the sense of urgency and desperation in Saigon for Diem had avoided any such open reliances upon U.S. support in the past, feeling that it would expose him to costly charges by the Communists and other opposition elements that he was a puppet of the Americans, whereas in fact his stability to act independently and on the basis of Vietnamese resources had always been a source of particular pride to him.

Pushed by his defense establishment and his Presidential representatives, and pulled by the urgent requests from the GVN, one has enough explanation -- if explaining is needed -- why Kennedy did not,

in the fall of 1961, reduce or fail to increase the U.S. commitment to SVN. As Secretary of State Rusk commented to the Indian Ambassador, We cannot afford another Laos. Yet, he did not send troops. Again, this did not seem to call for special explanation were it not for the urgency with which his advisors underlined the essentiality of U.S. combat forces in Vietnam precisely if the fate of ^{Laos} Vietnam were to be avoided. The ironic answer seems to be that the same ^{sort of} ~~source~~ of consideration that made it impossible for Kennedy to write down U.S. objectives and commitments in Vietnam as he had in Laos, made it inexpedient for him to adopt at that time ~~the~~ ^{his} strong measures urged upon him as minimally adequate to a defense of U.S. aims in SVN. He was not ready to reconsider his Laotian policy; to regard the defense of Laos and of Vietnam as inextricably locked, to conclude that the defense of the area as a whole required a firm stand on the ground in Laos, to abandon negotiations and introduce U.S. forces into Laos. The reinforcement of our position in SVN, then, had to proceed under the constraint that it not interfere fatally with the prospects for a negotiated solution in Laos, and Kennedy was assured, not only by advisors in State, and by such interested parties as India, but by the British (through a particularly trusted advisor, David Ormsby Gore) that the introduction of U.S. combat forces would destroy chances for even superficially acceptable negotiations over Laos. It can be conjectured that this consideration alone was sufficient to lead Kennedy to postpone the deployment of U.S. combat forces (though other considerations were probably also worked in) despite the fact that the bulk of the advice reaching him stressed the urgency of this move measured in weeks or months if even short run gains

within Vietnam were to be achieved.

In still other ways, the earlier crisis that virtually compelled Kennedy to positive action in "drawing a line against Communism" in the fall of 1961 worked simultaneously to deter him from backing up that line as strongly and aggressively as he was urged by his advisors. First, while the earlier process of decision making had left many in his own bureaucracy, particularly military advisors, with doubts on his resolve and perception of U.S. security, the same set of interactions with these advisors had left Kennedy with strong reservations on the judgment and prudence of those advisors and with some suspicion of proposals that seemed designed to tie his hands with respect to future decisions. In this situation, the proposal for U.S. forces was explicitly/ ^{not} urged as a requirement to meet an enemy physical threat, but to reassure psychologically an ally; the President might well have read into it a device to achieve his own irrevocable commitment to the defense of ambitious aims in SVN, a commitment he was not yet prepared to make. He may, in other words, have suspected that this motive distorted the judgment that the deployment was required for psychological reasons in SVN to avoid immediate deterioration; He is reported by Hillsman to have maintained that the increase in U.S. advisors and combat support -- ultimately to manpower levels exceeding the deployment of combat forces initially proposed, should be adequate to reassure Diem on the U.S. commitment (the actual affect on Diem's confidence, although it must be recalled that the increase in advisory effort offered by Kennedy was made in the context of a request by Diem for combat forces and of Diem's knowledge that the President's military assistant had endorsed

this proposal; the President's ultimate failure to offer combat forces could only be seen as an expression of a limited commitment, at least in the short run and whether this was strongly reassuring to Diem is open to doubt. In short, it is possible that the President doubted the estimates presented to him on the enemy necessity for stronger measures.

Another interaction of distant ^{threats} threats of crisis with Vietnam involved the President's reluctance in the fall of 1961 to become engaged in "a two-front war" (a comment he made to the Chairman of the JCS in November 1961) referring to the imminence of possible conflict in Europe with the Soviets over Berlin. Thus, while (according to Richard Goodman) the desire to signal resolution and determination to resist Communist advances to Khrushchev in the context of the Berlin crisis was as strong a motive as any other in Kennedy's mind in the fall of 1961 for taking a firm stand in SVN, his concern over Berlin was at the same time a deterrent against a diversion of resources to SEA with the probable consequence that it would lead to a seriously distracting combat involvement just at the time when attention would be needed for larger issues in Europe. Finally, there was the issue of whether the goals urged upon him for SVN -- and adopted by Kennedy as internal policy guidance -- were truly achievable by U.S. efforts in company with Diem, even with full scale U.S. commitment and use of ground troops. If they were not, the introduction of ground troops could only vastly increase the psychological and political concepts of an eventual defeat or unfavorable settlement. This possibility was never raised even as a remote contingency in any JCS discussion. And the issue of the

eventual outcome was held to depend only upon the degree of U.S. commitment; if the U.S. only communicated its resolve "to/^{do}whatever necessary" to defeat Communist purposes in SVN, and backed up that decision with resources, a favorable outcome ^{was} assured. The price could be high, if the North Vietnamese and Chinese Communists came into the fight in force but it was still limited; JCS estimates, endorsed by Secretary McNamara and General Taylor, were that some 205,000 U.S. troops (accompanied with foreseeable SEATO commitments) would almost certainly be adequate in the ⁺worse case of North Vietnamese and Chinese Communist invasion. But there is reason to suspect that Kennedy found this assessment, too, suspect. Again, his confidence in the reliability of military estimates of feasibility had been shaken severely by what he had observed of military counsels and deliberations on Laos and the Bay of Pigs in the spring of 1961. But his deeper skepticism undoubtedly went back much further. Vietnam was one area on which he had formed personal opinions very early on the basis of some personal observation. And these opinions had led him to a controversial public position in Congress on the feasibility of the French efforts both in Indochina and Algeria. ^{Each} ~~is~~ one of the recent chroniclers of the Kennedy Administration has noted that Kennedy not only had the opinion that the war had been unwinnable for the French, but that what had happened to the French could happen to the U.S. This was a conclusion to which the Defense Department had been, in the seven years since Dien Bien Phu, particularly resistful to. In fact, in documents available to this study, the thought occurs as a possibility in only one place of paper: a memo by Mr. Wm. Bundy who notes that the unfavorable

outcome risked by an increased U.S. involvement in SVN (which, on balance, he favored in the memo) was that "we end like the French."

But, even to those who saw such a possibility it was subject to further analysis. What had made the war unwinnable for the French was the political environment in which they fought: their colonialist motivations, and unwillingness to support a genuinely independent, nationalist Vietnamese leadership, and the resulting failure of the bulk of the Vietnamese population to identify with or participate in the fight against the Communist-led nationalist resistance. Likewise, what raised the spectre of a similar outcome for a US/GVN effort seven years later, were the disturbing similarities in the new situation to the old one, despite such striking disparities as the absence of a French involvement or similarly colonialist motivations on the part of the U.S. Scarcely more than Bao Dai did Ngo Dinh Diem, in 1961, attract the enthusiasm, dedication, loyalty or participation of the bulk of the Vietnamese population. This was true not because he was widely regarded as a puppet, as was Bao Dai -- on the contrary his credentials of nationalism, patriotism, and respectability in Vietnamese terms remained high to the end -- but because of quite other aspects of his political style he repelled and alienated block after block of Vietnamese society, excluding most of them from open participation in Vietnamese political life. In State Department and in CIA reporting and analysis through 1960, and into 1961 this was seen as a major factor threatening the stability of Diem's rule even against non-Communist opposition and leaving him vulnerable to a remote Communist threat.

And it was this factor that was seen by some individuals primarily outside the Defense Department as raising a question as to whether the war against the Viet Cong was winnable under Diem, even with full U.S. help, if Diem's approach to oppositionist elements did not change.

The clearest statement of this skepticism came in a cable from Dean Rusk who emphasized the urgency of obtaining commitments from Diem to broaden the political base of his regime and take other measures necessary to mobilize broad Vietnamese participation in the war. In the absence of such undertakings, Rusk expressed great reluctance to see a further commitment of U.S. prestige, such as would follow from a deployment of U.S. combat forces, to a losing reprise. This view of the criticality of the Vietnamese effort suggests that a U.S. strategy that would make major U.S. commitment contingent on the fulfillment by the GVN of those reforms and ^{measures} felt to be essential to the success of a joint effort. Such a conditional offer would seem to be the tactic best designed to achieve those desirable reforms; yet, if it nevertheless failed, this failure would signal the infeasibility of achieving U.S. ambitions in Vietnam in any case. And this was, indeed, the tactic adopted by the President in his initial response to the Taylor/State/Defense recommendations. In light of what we know of advice reaching the President, this tactic must be seen as a response to advice (including the President's own instance) primarily coming from outside the Defense Department, where the Vietnamese effort was not generally seen as absolutely critical to ultimate success, nor was political reform seen as essential to adequate Vietnamese participation. This advice was presumably not likely given, and it may well have accorded with the President's own intuition on the critical role of political factors within the conflict. Yet, when Diem proved resistant to the proposals

either for limited partnership with the U.S. or for political changes broadening his own regime, these U.S. aims, initially stated as flat conditions, if the U.S. were to carry out its own undertakings, were simply disrupted, or at least postponed indefinitely. (The validity of the concern expressed by Rusk and a few others in the fall of 1961 was underlined dramatically two years later, when precisely these matters of political note had fatally alienated the majority of the population and the U.S. public as well leading to the downfall of his regime, the collapse of the U.S. political policy in Vietnam, and to subsequent advances in the countryside by the Viet Cong which have never been fully recovered.)

Why were these conditions stated by the President in his guidance to his ambassador and in his communication to Diem so quickly (and, it finally appeared fatally) abandoned?" The answer, once again, would seem to lie in the network of pressures and expectations raised out by Kennedy's crisis decision-making through/1961. Formerly these requirements of the Vietnamese regime were presented in a letter from Kennedy as a necessary quid pro quo for the U.S. aid being offered; and the offer of aid was in turn a response to a formal request from Diem, which would seem to underline the unreasonableness of demanding a quid pro quo.

(2) But what made it possible for Diem to reject this interpretation of the situation was the precise background of Diem's request: Mainly, his belief, shared not only by most Vietnamese but by many Americans, that the security of his country had been immediately reduced by U.S. policy, reflecting U.S. deliberate policy, and that

his own confidence in the ultimate security of his country had been reduced by his interpretation, again, shared by many, of U.S. policy decisions not only in Laos, but in other areas, including undoubtedly the Bay of Pigs and the Berlin war¹. The immediate occasion and the cause for the urgency, for a public renewal of the U.S. commitment was precisely the fact that reassurance was needed and was owing to Diem (and other allies) in the wake of these Presidential decisions. From the point of view held by Diem, by U.S. policy makers, and ultimately, no doubt, by the President himself, new U.S. undertakings and commitments were themselves the quid pro quo to Diem for U.S. actions that had raised apprehension and undermined security of his borders. We were not, in a word, in a strong bargaining position to demand further recompense from Diem for our actions; especially so because as Diem knew (although the U.S. public did not) what we were offering in compensation for these earlier actions was less than what Diem himself, accepting some loss of dignity and face, had requested.

Furthermore, the quid pro quo which we were demanding from Diem took the form of political concessions which in his eyes both underⁿlined the reliability of his continued rule and questioned the competence of his political and administrative judgment and capacity. To press such points strongly at that particular moment was sharply to undermine what was regarded by all as the major aim of the U.S. undertakings; to reassure Diem of our confidence in him and continued backing for his regime. In the context of on-going developments in Laos, the ² twin goals of achieving political concessions from the Diem regime and of reassuring Diem of the strength of the U.S. commitment to him

12

through his regime were simply incompatible; and in the context described earlier, Kennedy was in no position to give precedence to the former goal **40** however essential to some of his advisors and perhaps he himself may have regarded it to be. Thus, the moment passed that offered the best, and perhaps the last opportunity for the exertion of major U.S. leverage to achieve liberal concessions from the Diem regime.

In sum, so long as the Laos negotiations dragged on inconclusively and the Berlin crisis simmered the President could neither withhold commitment and some increased involvement from Vietnam nor move forward there indecisively. With respect to SVN in the fall of 1961 it could be said that President Kennedy was commitment-prone, but troop-shy. If the Laotian crisis had not come earlier than Viet Cong pressure in Vietnam (and this was in a sense quite possible, for the Laotian crisis appeared to have erupted largely as a result of U.S. policies neither related to Vietnam nor historically inevitable) Kennedy might well have accepted the view that the security problems raised by Laos and Vietnam were closely linked and called for a coordinated policy; If the choice were strongly to defend the viability of SVN (and Thailand) the argument for holding fast in Laos as well was very strong; but if it were acceptable to seek a political . . . solution, with the probability of Communist domination in Laos (in preference to major U.S. involvement), the same reasoning could suggest limited objectives and commitment in SVN, with tacit acceptance of a political settlement there as well. There is no strong evidence that Kennedy might have been tempted to such a solution for SVN, as he was for Laos; but the point is noted here for analytical purposes that if he had been

so tempted (perhaps from a view on the intractability of the problem, not probably from any notion that U.S. interests in the area were negligible) he would have been considerably freer to implement such an approach had he not dragged the heavy chain behind him of earlier decisions in SEA, Cuba and Berlin.

The Geneva Agreements of 1954 bring an end to eight years of open warfare between the French (supported by the U.S. and ^{some} non-communist Vietnamese) and the Viet Minh, and begin a period of peace that ^{major participants} in a continuing struggle (gradually excluding the French) all regarded as the continuation of the earlier war by other means.

From the beginning of his regime in 1954 until his death in 1963, Ngo Dinh Diem was seen in Intelligence Estimates and political analyses as confronting two sorts of challenges: threats to the viability, stability and effectiveness of his governmental structure from factional, oppositionist, non-communist elements in SVN, on the one hand, and from the organized, communist-led remnants of the Viet Minh apparatus on the other. They were generally broken down into a short-term and a long-term threat; though the relative urgency of these two types of challenges switched places several times over the period. A third characteristic of the estimates between 1954 and 1961 was that they rarely expressed confidence that Diem could overcome both these threats, and usually the odds were judged to be against his surmounting either one of them.

In 1954, after Geneva, a forceful direct challenge by the communist apparatus was regarded as unlikely for the next two years; in other words, Diem was to have a respite from a confrontation with the communists — that might allow him time to deal with his other internal opponents and the weaknesses of his administrative system. However, this was not too reassuring, since it was assumed by most observers that the very reason why the communists were unlikely to make an open challenge during that period was the evident likelihood that Diem would fail to deal effectively with his other problems and that the communists would gain control of the entire country through elections by 1956, if not earlier. Thus, the NIE of 3 August 1954 (NIE 63-5-54, p. 1):

"We believe that the Communists will not give up their objective of securing control of all Indochina but will, without violating the armistice to the extent of launching an armed invasion to the south or west, pursue their objective by political, psychological, and paramilitary means."

true "Although it is possible that the French and Vietnamese, even with firm support from the U.S. and other powers, may be able to establish a strong regime in South Vietnam, we believe that the chances for this development are poor and, moreover, that the situation is more likely to continue to deteriorate progressively over the next year...."

11 The possibility of meeting a longer term challenge of the communists is seen, in the light of the lessons of the first Indochinese War, as requiring not only the establishment of a strong government in South Vietnam (thus defeating the short-term pressures toward chaos in the south) but in establishing a government under "strong Nationalist leadership." *U.S. aimed to win the loyalty and active participation of the population in the South* This, in turn, at that time, was seen to depend on swift, firm, French action to this end, a change in French policy; which appeared unlikely. (Ibid, p. 6).

1 "On the basis of the evidence we have at this early date, however, we believe that a favorable development of the situation in South Vietnam is unlikely. Unless Mendes-France is able to overcome the force of French traditional interests and emotions which have in the past governed the implementation of policy in Indochina, we do not believe there will be the dramatic transformation in French policy necessary to win the active loyalty and support of the local population for a South Vietnam Government...."

As the year wore on, the near paralysis of the government and the increasing challenges to Diem's leadership from non-communist elements seemed increasingly to confirm the estimated judgment of the communists that no forceful measures -- openly violating the Geneva Agreement and risking U.S. intervention, would be necessary to achieve the eventual estimation of their authority throughout Vietnam. This reinforced the expectation that the communists would stand back from open intervention at least until the scheduled date of elections in July 1956: Again, without providing a basis for short term optimism. Yet, as early as November, 1954, a National Estimate projected the likelihood that if -- contrary to expectations -- the communists should be denied a victory by political means on or before July 1956, they would turn to violent means, using their remaining apparatus in the south for terrorism and guerilla action and reinforcing by infiltration. According to NIE 63-7-54, 23 November 1954 (p. 9):

"We believe that the Viet Minh will continue to gain in political strength and prestige and, with Chinese aid, to increase its military striking power in North Vietnam. The Viet Minh probably now feels that it can achieve control over all Vietnam without initiating large-scale warfare. Accordingly, we believe that the Communists will exert every effort to accomplish their objectives through means short of war...."

"If, on the other hand, South Vietnam should appear to be gaining in strength or if elections were postponed over Communist objections, the Communists probably would step up their subversive and guerrilla activities in the South and if necessary would infiltrate

additional armed forces in an effort to gain control over the area...." (underlining added)

very much like the present situation in VN -

At this point, the "present key to political power in South Vietnam" was still held by the French. "Under present circumstances, only the French can provide to the legitimate governing authority in Vietnam the power it now lacks, and force the coalescence of the various factions, groups, and individuals." (Ibid, p. 5). ~~Whereas the masses of the population was divided among~~ As for Diem himself: "Diem, the leading lay Catholic in Vietnam, is honest, austere, and widely respected for his integrity and nationalistic zeal....However, Diem is rigid, unwilling to compromise, and inexperienced in the rough and tumble of politics. He is acutely suspicious of his colleagues on the political scene and is inclined to seek advice among a small group of relatives and close friends who, for the most part, are incapable of proffering sound counsel...None of the groups opposing Diem has any broad-based popular support. It is the weakness of Diem rather than any genuine political strength of their own that enables them to prolong the political crisis in Saigon...." (Ibid., p. 4)

keep this part

The estimate noted that the French might decide that in order to preserve their relationship with the U.S., "it is essential to support an anti-Communist South Vietnam, postponing elections if necessary. The French would feel, however, that such a course would involve a substantially increased risk of renewed hostilities with the Viet Minh...." (Ibid., p. 8)

"We believe that the French estimate that South Vietnam cannot be held over the long term, except at very high cost." (Ibid, p. 8).

Since the French were not likely to provide Diem with the "full and

positive support" (despite a French-U.S. understanding of September 29, in which the French agreed "to support Diem in the establishment of a strong, anti-Communist regime in Vietnam." (Ibid., p. 7), And, "Diem will probably not be able to reestablish the authority of the government throughout South Vietnam and to tackle effectively the multitude of pressing problems now facing the country." (Ibid., p. 8). Thus, the estimate ended on a gloomy note: "We believe, on the basis of present trends, it is highly unlikely that South Vietnam will develop the strength necessary to counter growing Communist subversion within its border; it almost certainly would not be able to defeat the Communists in country-wide elections. Even before the elections scheduled for 1956, the probable growth of Communist influence in the South may result in strong pressures within South Vietnam for coalition with the North." (Ibid., p. 9) (underlining added)

Subsequently, reassessment of Diem's successes in early 1955 in subduing a variety of factional, non-communist challenges to his leadership, the U.S. moved into the key role in support of Diem it had earlier hoped the French might undertake. Yet, the question posed by the French appreciation of the situation remained hanging: Was it possible to hold South Vietnam "over the long term" without a "very high cost." The events of the last few years do not confirm that possibility, proving the French wrong. On the other hand, they do not wholly prove the French right; for evidence one way or the other on this issue will just look into the "might have been's" that are among the objects of this study.

By the Spring of 1955, Diem was engaged in a sharp confrontation with the Binh Xuyen gangster sect and with the religious sects of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai, but the possibility could be seen that he would (as in fact, he did) win victory and increase his prestige and authority. Nevertheless, the Estimate of 26 April 1955 (NIE-63.1-2-55, p.3) ^{is?} was pessimistic about his longer-term prospects in what was then "the other war," the conflict ^{in the region} with the communists.

"Even if the present impasse were resolved, we believe that it would be extremely difficult, at best, for a Vietnamese government, regardless of its composition, to make progress toward developing a strong, stable anti-Communist government capable of resolving the basic social, economic, and political problems of Vietnam, the special problems arising from the Geneva agreement, and capable of meeting the long-range challenge of the Communists...." (NIE 63.1-2-55, p.3)

Meanwhile, it continued to appear likely that open communist pressure would be postponed until mid-1956, but only until then. An estimate of probable developments in North Vietnam to July 1956 concluded:

"....The resumption of widespread guerrilla activities appears unlikely prior to the election deadline, unless the DRV should come to the conclusion that South Vietnam can be won only by force. Such a conclusion would become more likely should the Diem government persist in refusing to enter the election discussions, should election discussions not proceed favorably for the DRV, or should the Diem government succeed, with US assistance, in consolidating its strength to the point of becoming a nationalist alternative to the

the only alternative

Ho regime. Moreover, if during the period of this estimate little progress is made towards relaxing tensions, Peiping and Moscow might permit the DRV greater freedom of action. Should the DRV decide to use force short of open invasion, it would probably attempt to undermine the Saigon government by initiating a campaign of sabotage and terror, seeking the formation of a new government more amenable to demands for a national coalition. These tactics are likely to include the activation of DRV guerrilla units now in South Vietnam and their reinforcement by the infiltration in small units of regulars from the North." (underlining added).

(NIE 63.1-55, 19 Jul 1955, p. 2)

By the fall of 1955, although Diem still faced a struggle with Hoa Hao and Cao Dai (having destroyed ⁻⁴¹Binh Nuyen), it seemed likely that he would win this conflict and emerge with unchallenged authority, at least for a time, over the non-communist elements in South Vietnam. Yet:

"Nevertheless, the success of Diem's efforts to establish a viable anti-Communist government in South Vietnam is still in doubt. Although Diem has established control over the apparatus of government, he has dealt only in part with such fundamental problems as: (a) the development of an effective administration, particularly on provincial and local levels; (b) the institution of a popularly-sanctioned constitutional basis for the regime; (c) the elimination of armed opposition and the extension of government authority throughout all areas of South Vietnam; (d) the suppression of Viet Minh military and political capabilities remaining in South Vietnam; and (e) the restoration of the economy." (underlining added)

(NIE 63.1-3-55, 11 Oct 55) 8

The time was approaching when he did face what was, in 1954, a "longer-run" threat, posed by communist reaction to a denial of their hopes for peaceful political victory.

"Diem will almost certainly not agree to hold national elections for the unification of Vietnam by July 1956. Although Diem, under pressure from the Western Powers, might reluctantly agree to indirect consultations with the DRV concerning elections, he would insist on conditions which he felt certain the Communists would be unable to accept. Aware that such a position will probably cause the Viet Minh to increase their efforts to destroy his government, Diem will probably seek to bind the US more specifically to the defense of Vietnam."

General O'Daniel
(Diem emphasized not ORO support)

"The Viet Minh, despite their relative quiescence, present the greatest potential threat to Diem. Should the Viet Minh elect openly to invade the south with regular forces, they are capable of defeating the VNA and any French forces (if committed) now present in South Vietnam. Moreover, with an estimated 10,000 military personnel in South Vietnam, the Viet Minh have the capability to undertake local sabotage and terrorist actions, and small-scale but widespread guerrilla warfare. The Viet Minh can reinforce these forces by infiltrating into South Vietnam. The Viet Minh apparently exerts political influence in many areas scattered throughout South Vietnam." (underlining added)

(NIE 63.1-3-55, 11 Oct 55) (p. 1)

"Should the Viet Minh initiate large-scale guerrilla operations supported by substantial infiltration from the north, the South Vietnamese government would be hard pressed to do more than maintain control in the Saigon-Cholon area and in a few other major urban

centers. If the operation were prolonged, the government probably could not survive without military assistance from outside."

(Ibid., p. 2)

Diem's greatest assets in this struggle were:

"...his reputation for honesty and unsullied nationalism, his control of the Vietnamese National Army, and the moral and financial support of the U.S. In addition, Diem has gained considerable popular following, especially in urban centers and in recently pacified areas and has the loyalty of the refugees from North Vietnam. However, should he lose army or US support, his regime would probably collapse." (underlining added)

(Ibid., p. 3)

As early as 1955, limitations that later were to loom large on his ability to attract subordinate leadership were already evident:

"...His cabinet is composed primarily of loyal technicians who lack political stature. Most well known political figures of the pre-Diem period have been alienated by Diem's unwillingness to trust them and by his insistence that unquestioned acceptance of his leadership is the only basis for cooperation. Diem has depended heavily on his unpopular brothers for advice and entrusts them with positions of great responsibility. His tendency toward 'one man rule,' his dependence on his brothers for advice, and his rejection of Vietnamese leaders whom he does not trust, has denied his government many of the few trained administrators."

(Ibid., pp. 3 & 4.)

US failure
too

(US didn't intervene
; force Diem to take
non-Comm nationalists;
should have.)

As for the public, when he took office in July 1954,

"....the most significant articular political sentiment of the bulk of the population was an antipathy for the French combined with a personal regard for Ho Chi Minh as the symbol of Vietnamese Nationalism...." (Ibid., p. 2)

Diem's efforts to "galvanize mass popular support" concentrated

Diem undermined Bao Dai

initially on "exploiting popular antipathy for Bao Dai and the French"

and subsequently on developing "strong anti-Communist sentiment."

(Ibid., p. 4). Nevertheless, confronting a communist regime in

North Vietnam "possessing a far stronger Army, a more experienced

administration, greater cohesion of leadership and greater drive than the

government of South Vietnam," (Ibid., p. 5) and let by Ho Chi Minh,

"Premier Diem will almost certainly not agree to a text of relatively

popular strengths in national elections." (Ibid., p. 5).

Although no estimates in this period assumed the communists would open guerrilla operations immediately upon the frustration of their election hopes in 1956, the estimates recognized increasing pressures upon the communists not to postpone to late a shift to violent methods of achieving their constant long run political objectives.

"....They probably estimate that unless they effectively challenge the position of the Diem government the latter will gradually strengthen and stabilize its position. Moreover, they have probably concluded that Diem will not agree to elections or unification schemes which would favor the Communists. Under these circumstances the chances for a Communist take-over of the south by means short of open force might decline. On the other hand, the Communists also probably

realize that the use of force against South Vietnam -- either through open invasion or by infiltrating sufficient troops across the 17th Parallel to insure a successful 'liberation' -- would jeopardize current Bloc peace policies and risk provoking US intervention. In addition, the Communists may not presently have sufficient strength in South Vietnam quickly to overthrow the Diem government and may therefore estimate that to undertake widespread guerrilla warfare without substantial infiltration from the north might lead not only to the weakening of their exposed organization in the south but also to a drastic loss of public support." (Ibid., p. 6)

However, as a later estimate noted that if substantial infiltration should be required, the resources existed:

"....Ninety-five thousand men were evacuated from the south in the first few months following the Armistic. The DRV probably views this group as a possible instrument for subversive activity in South Vietnam and some may have been retrained, reindoctrinated, and perhaps even reinfilitrated." (NIE 63-56, 17 Jul 56), p. 6.

By March 1956, Diem had reduced the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao groups to political impotence and had won a substantial majority in South Vietnam's first national elections; "no openly anti-Diem Deputy was elected... due in part to government manipulation of the election campaign and in part to a boycott of the elections by most of the opposition parties." (Ibid, p. 7).

It was likely that "organized non-communist resistance" would virtually disappear by 1957 and, indeed, that South Vietnam's military and security forces could maintain "the government in power against any potential armed

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opposition now located south of the 17th parallel." (Ibid, p. 10).

(I.e., Even against communist armed strength in the south estimated at "8,000 - 10,000 with approximately 5,000 organized in skeletal company and battalion sized units which could be expanded through recruitment.") (Ibid, p. 11) However, longer run prospects of the regime still depended on the decision of the North Vietnamese regime whether, and when, to activate their apparatus in the south and infiltrate "regroupees" from the north.

"....In the event of large scale, concerted guerrilla warfare supported by infiltration of men and supplies from the north, relatively large areas of rural Vietnam probably would be lost to government control...." (Ibid, p. 10).

"....if the Communists decide to exercise their capability for armed intimidation and terror they could quickly reassert political control or influence, at least in some rural areas where GVN authority is tenuous.

"During the past year the Communists in South Vietnam have remained generally quiescent. They have passed by a number of opportunities to embarrass the Diem regime. Although some cadres and supplies are being infiltrated across the 17th parallel, the DRV probably has not sent any large scale reinforcement or supply to the south. Communist activity in the south appears to concentrate on protecting vital bases and supply caches, developing clandestine paramilitary organizations, and implementing a broad program of infiltration and subversion. While seeking to maintain intact as much of their ~~small~~ strength as possible, their main activity seems to be an effort to weaken the Diem government by subversive and

political tactics. Communist directives indicate that penetration and subversion of the GVN military and security forces is a major objective...." (Ibid, p. 11)

But the communists' choices were narrowing all the time:

"The DRV probably estimates that its chances for securing control of South Vietnam by means short of open attack or large scale guerrilla action supported from the north will gradually diminish with the passage of time....The DRV probably also believes that its covert assets in South Vietnam will gradually decline if the Diem government is permitted to concentrate on internal security and economic problems free of external harassment."

(Underlining added). (Ibid., pp. 12-13).

Thus,

"The only remaining course of action holding out some promise for the early achievement of Communist control in South Vietnam appears to be the development of large scale guerrilla warfare in the south."

In recent weeks a number of reports from sources of untested reliability have indicated that the Communists may have started preparations in both South Vietnam and in the north to begin guerrilla action. DRV allegations of Vietnamese violations of the demilitarized zone along the 17th parallel and Communist claims of US-Diem plans to violate the Armistice could be propaganda cover for the initiation of guerrilla action against the south. (Ibid., p. 13)

By January 1960 communist terrorism and guerrilla action had moved from the status of a long run potential threat to the viability of the Diem regime to the status of the GVN's "number one problem," as analyzed in a long Mission discussion: "Special Report on Internal Security Situation in Vietnam" (Encl 1 to Dispatch #278 from Saigon, 29 Jan 1960).

This appreciation of the problem high-lighted so many characteristics of the problems confronting Diem and U.S. policy that were to prove critical in subsequent years that it deserves extensive citation.

Internal security had once again become the primary problem of the GVN as a result of: (1) "intensification of Viet Cong guerrilla and terrorist activities;" (2) "weaknesses apparent in the GVN security forces"; and (3) "the growth of apathy and considerable dissatisfaction among the rural populace." "The situation has grown progressively more disturbing since shortly after the National Assembly elections at the end of August 1959, despite the fact that President Diem was claiming, to the end of December, that internal security was continuing to improve."

1. Viet Cong Activity

Government operations had intensified during the Spring of 1955 when it increased its forces engaged in internal security operations. Added precautions taken by the GVN during the period prior to and immediately following the August 30 National Assembly elections further suppressed VC activity. The upswing in VC operations first showed up in a sharp increase in assassinations and kidnappings in the last half of September. Where the total for assassinations in 1958 had been 193, there were 119 assassinations in the last four months of 1959 (for a yearly total of 233); in January 1960, there were to be 96 civilians killed

and in February, 1968. Meanwhile, significant Viet Cong attacks on GVN military forces also began in September, revealing characteristics on both the Viet Cong and GVN sides that were to become dishearteningly familiar in the next five years:

"The post-election intensification of VC attacks began with the completely successful engagement of two ~~ARVN~~ ARVN companies on September 26. The poor performance of ARVN during this operation exposed a number of weaknesses which have been commented upon by many CAS and MAAG sources in the Vietnamese Government. MAAG's evaluation of the factors contributing to ARVN's failure include security leaks, inadequate planning, lack of aggressive leadership, failure to communicate information to other participating units and the failure of supporting units to press forward to engage the VC (they were close enough to hear the sound of gunfire at the time). Another factor of importance illustrated in this ambush was the confidence of the VC in their ability to successfully conduct such operations. This self assurance and aggressiveness appear to be characteristic of many actions taken by the VC since September and have probably contributed to the low state of morale reported in GVN security units by CAS sources."

(Despatch ²⁷⁸ ~~277~~ from Saigon, ~~rx~~ Encl. No.1, p. 3)

It was incidents like this, and particularly an attack on an ARVN regimental post ^{near Tay Ninh} ~~(near Tay Ninh)~~ in January, that brought on "the full impact of the seriousness of the present situation:

"The Viet Cong attack on the Vietnamese Army installation near Tay Ninh on January 26 is a dramatic illustration of the increasingly aggressive tactics of the Viet Cong and of the difficulty the GVN is having in controlling the internal security situation.

The audacity of the Viet Cong in conducting the attack, the likelihood of VC infiltration into ARVN, the indications of secret support of the VC by some of the local populace, the successful planning and coordination in carrying out the attack as opposed to apparent failure of ARVN, which had been told there might be an attack, to be sufficiently alert for such an attack and to effectively counter once the attack had been launched, are indications of many of the problems faced by the GVN and discussed in this report."

(Ibid, p. 1)

Armed propaganda operations involving large numbers of Viet Cong in daylight were a third category of Viet Cong activities.

"....The fact that the VC can, and have on a number of occasions, entered fair sized communities, spent several hours or a day propagandizing the population and then retired without meeting GVN resistance would indicate that the VC have an effective intelligence system." (Ibid, p. 5)

"CAS sources have reported a gradual increase of the infiltration of VC cadres and arms from the DRV over the past few months which has increased the VC strength to about 3000 in the Southwest. (Based on available information CAS estimates that the Viet Cong strength in all South Viet-Nam is presently 3000-5000 men). Many of these new infiltrators, according to a CAS source who is a GVN Official, are cadres who were regrouped in the North at the time of the Geneva Accords and have had a number of years of intensive military and political training. The principal infiltration route of VC cadres from the North continues to be through Laos to Cambodia although reports are received of infiltration by sea. A CAS source

~~source~~ with similar access reports that some of the cadres arriving in SVN from the North have the mission of establishing a VC headquarters to include a general staff, a political section and a supply section and to effect a large-scale reorganization of VC cadres in the ~~the~~ southwestern provinces (Fifth Military Region). " (Ibid, p. 7)

Behind all this activity were verbal indications of DRV intent:

"In May 1959, the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party passed a resolution or statement stating that the struggle for reunification would have to be carried out by 'all appropriate measures'. British observers have taken this to mean measures other than peaceful.

"'You must remember we will be in Saigon tomorrow, we will be in Saigon tomorrow', these words were spoken by Premier Pham van Dong in a conversation with French Consul Georges-Picot on September 12, 1959.

"In November, Pham van Dong twice told Canadian Commissioner Erichsen-Brown that 'we will drive the Americans into the Sea'." (Ibid., pp. 6-7)

2. ARVN Weaknesses.

"....Numerous high-ranking GVN officials have very recently stressed the necessity of more anti-guerrilla training for the security forces. From a military point of view an outstanding deficiency in the GVN effort has been the government's inability, or lack of desire, to recognize the following factors:

(1) It is actively engaged in an internal war and, therefore, must take the measures which this situation entails.

(2) There is a great need for a strong central military command

Insert

get a close look at the actual list of ARVN failings; VC Strengths & population attitudes cited earlier & later in this same message raises strong doubts that many of these particular factors in ARVN's "apparent" lack of success resulted from lack of unity of command.

with wide powers for the conduct of internal security operations in the unpacified areas.

(3) There is a need for a capable, well-equipped, well-trained, centrally-controlled Civil Guard to take over from the Military in pacified areas.

"It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the apparent lack of success in the GVN attempts to reduce the internal threat of the VC until now has stemmed from the lack of unity of command in a single operational commander who has the means and the authority to utilize all of the potential in the area of operations without regard to province or regional boundaries and without regard to the existing political subdivision of ~~the~~ the area. Unity of command is the most important basic principle of administration lacking here. The Province Chief structure has caused a breakdown of coordination and a fragmentation of command structure which has blocked an effective attack on the internal security problem." (Ibid, pp. 28-9)

(The splitting of responsibility for internal security between the Province Chief who controlled Provincial forces, and the military chain of command controlling ARVN was a constant complaint by MACV during the later Diem period.) *Unity of command was the primary aim of MACV influence, the main hope of American military for improving GVN performance.* (INSERT)

3. Political Factors

"....The VC reportedly estimate that 70% of the people in the rural areas of South Viet-Nam are either embittered by or indifferent toward the present government...." (Ibid, p. 8)

"It is highly unlikely that any final solution can be found to the internal security situation in South ~~Viet-Nam~~ Viet-Nam if the GVN does not enjoy the support and cooperation of the rural population. The indications are that the rural population

is generally apathetic towards the Diem Government and there are signs of considerable dissatisfaction and silent opposition. In part this attitude appears to result from widespread fear of the Viet Cong and a belief that the GVN is relatively helpless to protect the rural population from Viet Cong depredations. Unfortunately the longer serious insecurity ~~and~~ continues to exist in the countryside despite GVN effort to control it, the more serious is the effect on the ~~the~~ GVN's prestige. Another effect is a growing belief among the peasants that the Viet Cong will always be here as long as North Viet-Nam remains under Communist control and that they must adjust to live with them. (A realization of the long-range nature of the problem among officials responsible for dealing with it could be an advantage. In Malaya it has taken 11 ~~years~~ years to reduce the security situation to the minimum, and it is even more difficult to deal with it in a divided country with long exposed frontiers).

"There appear to be other reasons contributing to the difficulty experienced by the GVN in attempting to rally the rural population:

(a) Until recently it was becoming more and more apparent that Diem was not being given accurate information on the internal security and political situation in rural areas. As late as the end of December, 1959, he was telling all callers how much better the internal security situation had become, despite many doubts raised by his listeners. Information was apparently being presented to him by local officials in such a manner as to reflect well upon the officials giving it. The President's trips to the provinces have appeared to be carefully 'laid on' by local officials. The President himself cannot be absolved entirely from the blame, however, since his system of personal rule which permits direct appeal from the individual provincial

Typical of U.S. myopia.
The No. 1 factor is the
arrogant style of the
GVN administration.
The No. 2 is V.C. appeal
(Both because of to social
look-nine and its peasant
style)

authorities to himself, in a sort of intra-executive check and balance system, serves to further weaken the administrative apparatus.

"Recently, however, as indicated in the subsequent section on 'GVN Reactions', the Vice President and others who are not his usual informers on security matters have spoken frankly with him and he now seems well aware of the situation.

(b) Provincial and district authorities exercise almost autonomous control in the areas under their jurisdiction. Too often the personnel holding these positions have been incompetent, having been chosen for reason of party loyalty. Moreover, some have tended to view their jobs as a means to personal advancement or financial gain often at the cost of the population under their control. Press editorials have attacked local officials for extorting money from peasants, using torture to wring false confessions from innocent people and conducting themselves in such a manner as to reflect adversely on the prestige of the national government. In addition rumors continue to circulate among the population concerning the ~~rumors~~ alleged nefarious activities of and favoritism shown to members of the Can Lao party. While officials have been largely unable to identify and put out of commission Viet Cong undercover cadres among the population, they have often arrested people on the basis of rumors or of denunciations by people who harbor only personal grudges. Police powers justified on the basis of the needs of internal security have reportedly been misused to extort money not only from the peasants but from land owners, ~~small~~ merchants and professional ~~and~~ people in the towns. This misuse of police powers and the kind of broad scale arrests on suspicion are weakening the support of the population for the regime. On the other hand, the ~~rumors~~

application of swift, summary justice (such as the Special Military Tribunals were created to hand out) designed to protect the population against the Viet Cong threat, if carefully administered and 'advertised' as such, can do much to restore a feeling of security;

"(c) While the GVN has made an effort to meet the economic and social needs of the rural populations through community development, the construction of schools, hospitals, roads, etc., these projects appear to have enjoyed only a measure of success in creating support for the government and, in fact, in many instances have resulted in resentment. Basically, the problem appears to be that such projects have been imposed on the people without adequate psychological preparation in terms of the benefits to be gained. Since most of these projects call for sacrifice on the part of the population (in the form of allegedly 'volunteer' labor in the case of construction, time away from jobs or school in the ~~case~~ case of rural youth groups, leaving homes and lands in the case of regrouping isolated peasants), they are bound to be opposed unless they represent a partnership effort for mutual benefit on the part of the population and the government. (See subsequent section on 'GVN Reactions' for indications of Diem's current awareness of this problem).

"The situation may be summed up in the fact that the government has tended to treat the population with suspicion or to coerce it and has been rewarded with an attitude of apathy or resentment. The basic factor which has been lacking is a feeling of rapport between the government and the population. The people have not identified themselves with the government. There has been a general lack of 'a sense of mission' in the ~~building~~ building of the country among both the local population and local authorities." (Ibid, pp. 9, 10, 11, 12) (footnotes excluded)

The above report on internal security had concluded that Diem was now aware of the gravity of the problem and was taking some countermeasures, but their inadequacy was ~~indicating~~ indicated by a Special NIE of 23 August 1960 (SNIE 63.1-60). The VC terrorism had continued to ~~int~~ intensify: in the first five months of 1960, 780 government officials and sympathizers were assassinated by insurgents. Since January ~~xxxxix~~ armed attacking units had been operating ~~over~~ over wider areas than at any time since 1954.

"....Support from North Vietnam appears to have increased over the past several months. In particular, senior cadres and military supplies such as communications equipment are believed to be moving south through Laos and Cambodia and by junk along the eastern coastline." (SNIE 63.1-60, p. 3)

But along with this further increase in communist pressure came increasing threats to stability from non-communist quarters, reminiscent of the 1954-55 period:

"....At the same time, grievances against the government, which have long been accumulating, have become increasingly urgent and articulate."

Throughout this estimate, the dual threats of communist and non-communist opposition are presented in parallel, with priority going to the non-communists. In its discussion of Diem's political problems, this estimate followed closely the analysis of the Mission report of six months earlier but ^{ed} indicating that, as in the military case, the problems were not only continuing but intensifying.

"Discontent with the Diem government has been prevalent for some time among intellectuals and elite circles and, to a lesser

extent, in labor and urban business groups. Criticism by these elements focusses on Ngo family rule, especially the roles of the President brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, and Madame Nhu; the pervasive influence of the Can Lao, the semi-clandestine apparatus of the regime; Diem's virtual one-man rule; and the growing evidence of corruption in high places. In late April, 18 prominent Vietnamese publicly petitioned Diem to 'liberalize the regime, expand democracy, grant minimum civil rights, (and) recognize the opposition in order to let the people speak without fear.' This unprecedented public attack on Diem by a non-Communist group may embolden other urban elements to become more vocal.

"A new and even more important element in the political situation is the growing criticism of Diem's leadership within government circles, ~~including~~ including the official bureaucracy and military; this criticism has become more intense than at any time since 1956. Since the early part of this year, Vice President Tho, other members of the cabinet, and middle echelon officials ~~have~~ have made known their serious concern over Diem's handling of the internal security problem and have privately criticized the power and influence exerted by Nhu and his entourage. In addition, there is considerable uneasiness concerning the operations and activities of the Can Lao organization.

"Although most of the Vietnamese peasants are politically apathetic, they also have their grievances against the government. These include
 ① the ineptitude and arrogance of many local and provincial officials, the
 ② lack of effective protection from Viet Cong demands in many parts of
 the country, ③ the harshness with which many peasants have been forced
 to contribute their labor to government programs, and the unsettling
 economic and social effects of the agrovillage (government-sponsored

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

settlements) program. As a consequence, Diem's government is lacking in positive support among the people in the countryside."

(Ibid., pp. 1-2)

Although the estimate confirmed that Diem had become concerned over the ~~in~~ deteriorating internal security situation, he appeared still to underestimate the non-communist political threat:

"....He still tends to discount the amount of discontent both in the countryside and among urban elements. Although he has taken some steps to meet the internal security problem, he tends to view it almost entirely in military terms. He believes that increased military activity against the Viet Cong, along with an expansion of the agrovillage program, will greatly improve internal security. He has been openly contemptuous of the views of oppositionists in Saigon and regards them as uninformed and dupes of the Communists. Diem also has failed to take any major steps against corruption and arbitrary conduct on the part of the Can Lao organization."

After this discussion of the political situation, the estimate discussed the Viet Cong pressures as: "aggravating many of the government's problems."

(Ibid., p.2) (Underlining added). The earlier report on internal security had commented "It is not completely clear why the DRV has chosen this particular time to mount an intensified guerrilla campaign in South Vietnam."

(Saigon 278, p. 2) and had advanced several hypotheses including Diem's view that it represented "a somewhat desperate attempt to disrupt the progress of South Vietnam," in the face of steady GVN progress and DRV failure to interfere successfully with the National Assembly elections in

August. The list of hypotheses in March did not include the possibility that the communists might have judged that the political situation within SVN had significantly deteriorated (earlier foreseen as the likely occasion for an increase in overt communist activities,) but the August estimate emphasized this possibility.

"....The indications of increasing dissatisfaction with the Diem government have probably encouraged the Hanoi regime, supported and guided by the Chinese Communists, to take stronger action at this time....~~However, the situation is given~~ "...a sizable and effective indigenous guerrilla apparatus responsive to Communist control;" and "a government lacking in positive support from its people;.. (SNIE 63.1-60, p. 3)

The estimate concluded with the pregnant comment that:

"In countering the Viet Cong challenge, Diem faces many of the same problems which confronted the French during the ~~Indo~~ Indo-China War...."

Some relevant aspects of earlier estimates might be recorded here:

"Despite these advances [which included "the relocation of ~~scattered~~ scattered villages in the Delta into centralized and defensible sites' as 'an important step toward the eventual 'pacification' of heavily infiltrated areas' and increases in the size of Vietnamese National Army] Vietnam still lacks the degree of political strength essential for the mobilization of the country's resources.... elected local councils have no real power, promised land reform and other social and economic reforms which might generate popular support had not left the planning stage and the Vietnamese government is

handicapped by incompetent cabinet ministers and the lack of competent administrators." (NIE 9- - 4 Jun 53, p.3)

"Finally, unless the French Union forces prove strong enough to provide security for the Vietnamese population, it will not be possible to sweep the guerrillas out of the areas as planned. Not only will the populace fail generally to provide the intelligence required to rout the guerrillas but, as in the past, they will frequently give warning of the ~~presence~~ presence of the French Union forces, thus permitting the guerrillas to take cover and later to emerge when the danger is past." (Ibid., p. 5)

Seven years later, the estimate of August 1960 was pointing out

"....Viet Cong guerrilla units have succeeded in exploiting their natural advantages of surprise, mobility, and initiative. In many of their areas of operations, they have exploited the tendency of the largely passive population to accommodate to their presence and thereby avoid reprisals. In some areas of operations, however, they have obtained the active cooperation of the local population." (SNIE 63.1-60, p. 3)

"In the absence of more effective government measures to protect the peasants and to win their ~~positive~~ positive cooperation, the prospect is for expansion of the areas of Viet Cong control in the countryside, particularly in the southwestern provinces.

"Dissatisfaction and discontent with the government will probably continue to rise unless the security situation improves and unless Diem can be brought to reduce the corruption and excesses of his regime...."

The conclusions of the estimate were the most ominous since

1956:

"Developments within South Vietnam over the past six months indicate a trend adverse to the stability and effectiveness of President Diem's government...."

"Although Diem's personal position and that of his government are probably not now in danger, the marked deterioration since January of this year is disturbing. These adverse trends are not irreversible, but if they remain unchecked, they will almost certainly in time cause the collapse of Diem's regime. We do not anticipate that this will occur within the period of this estimate. However, if Diem is not able to alter present trends and the situation deteriorates substantially, it is possible during the period of this estimate that the government will lose control over much of the countryside and a political crisis will ensue." (Ibid., p. 1)

~~Document~~: U.S. policy toward Vietnam could not yet be said to be facing a crisis but a crisis was ~~clearly~~ clearly on the way.

^{although}
~~Soon after this~~ SNIE had portrayed the twin dangers to the Diem

regime in the realms of non-communist political unrest and rural insurgency,
^{on essentially equal terms}
 describing both as urgent threats, analyses ^{had later} appeared in the Department of
 State and the Department of Defense revealing ^{and differing} ~~a discrepancy~~ in attitudes
^{toward}
~~for~~ the relative urgency of these two problems. In particular, from
 this date forward, the Department of Defense discussions, both in
 Washington and Saigon, emphasized predominantly the rural threat of the
 communist insurgents and particularly its military aspects, ^{tending} ~~intended~~ to
 deprecate the significance or urgency of non-communist complaints against
 the regime. Whereas analyses by the Department of State or the Ambassador
~~in Saigon~~ recognized, at least in principle, the importance of both
 military and political problems, ~~concentrating on the latter simply by~~
~~reason of its own sphere of responsibility,~~ Department of Defense analyses
 tended to regard ^{GVN} measures and U.S. pressures addressed to the problem
 of increasing support for Diem or reducing complaints among urban elites,
 middle level officials, ^{sects} and other factions, as competitive with the measures of
 military organization and ^{U.S.} support regarded by the Pentagon and the MAAG as
~~one~~ more urgent and the real key to ^{suppressing} ~~expressing~~ the Communist challenge.

Indeed, the Pentagon tended to fear that U.S. pressures on these political matt
 jeopardized the confidence and cooperation from Diem that were essential to
 achieving ^{an} adequate military posture in line with U.S. thinking.

The divergency, in emphasis, at least, shows clearly in papers written
 immediately after issuance of the 30 August SNIE. Alarmed at the
 ominous conclusion of the SNIE, Deputy Secretary of Defense Douglass asked
 ASD(ISA) for comments and recommendations on how to remedy the "deteriorating
 situation in South Vietnam." ^{In reply,} ~~For his reply,~~ a memo was submitted by

Brigadier General Edward G. Lansdale, GMD. In ~~this case~~, ^{the views}

"As noted by the Deputy Secretary of Defense, conditions in Vietnam are deteriorating. The key element in the situation is the activity of the Viet Cong. While criticism of Diem's government in metropolitan areas adds to his problems and interacts with Viet Cong plans, the Viet Cong remains the primary threat to security...."

(Memo for Admiral E. J. O'Donnell, Regional Director, Far East, ISA, from Brig General Edward G. Lansdale, OSO/OSD, 13 September 1960, Subject: Possible Courses of Action in Vietnam), p. 1

The emphasis in this appreciation of the problem (underlining added) must be read in context with the discussion in the SNIE ~~which was the occasion~~ ^{for} ~~this memorandum~~; ^{there} ~~and~~ virtually equal emphasis had been given to the political problems created by Diem's own manner of rule and ^{the} ~~various~~ discontents ^{it} provoked ~~by it~~ among non-communist elements.

To the end of meeting the threat from the Viet Cong, Lansdale suggested ² (among other items):

"...The emphasis of the MAAG function should be shifted from purely training and organizational advice in preparation for defense against external aggression to include on-the-spot advice and assistance in the conduct of tactical operations against the Viet Cong." (underlining added)

"...Concomitantly, the MAAG should be staffed to a greater extent with officers skilled in the conduct of counter-guerrilla operations and who are capable of operating in the field. This might include Marines for amphibious instruction on Mekong River operations...."

"...During the emergency, the Civil Guard should be temporarily put under the Ministry of Defense in order to integrate the activities of the ARVN and the Civil Guard. The Ambassador's concern that the Civil Guard will lose all identity as a civil police force, if this action is taken, is invalid, providing a strong US position to the contrary is announced and maintained."

(Ibid, pp. 1-2)

(Subsequent development of ^{the} Regional Forces, which grew out of the Civil Guard after transfer to the Ministry of Defense ^{in Dec. 1960}, showed this

particular concern of the Ambassador to have been a valid one -- whatever the countervailing ^{line} advantages of the move -- in that its role and capabilities as a police force atrophied almost entirely; no strong U.S. position to the contrary had been taken, ^{by MAAG, AIS, or CAS.}

"...Emphasis on civic action type activities by the ARVN should be encouraged and advicosry and material assistance in this field furnished through MAAP and ICA channels."

"...Most importantly for the purpose of strengthening the morale of the Vietnamese, President Diem should be informed as soon as possible through appropriate channels of the gravity with which the US government views the internal security situation, of our intent to provide material assistance, and of our unswerving support to him in this time of crisis." (underlining added)

(Ibid, p. 2).

Meanwhile, Ambassador Durbrow in Saigon ^{proceeded to} elaborate upon the various political threats described in the August 30 SNIE. A week after this ^{to} August 1960 SNIE was published, Ambassador Durbrow found it appropriate to send an assessment of the potentialities of various groups for coups and demonstrations in the short run. Among these were:

"1. Peasants. Various factors discontent exist such as lack of adequate protection against communist attacks and pressures, low prices paddy, compulsory labor on agrovilles and other projects, and arbitrary methods of authorities. Diem has taken some steps to try alleviate sources of discontent (our G-79) but it is important he take others because peasantry represent key to success or failure communist guerrilla warfare in countryside and thus to gradual undermining of regime. However, any sudden demonstration or coup against GVN likely to center in Saigon and seems improbable that peasantry in view lack organization, transport problems, etc. would play significant role therein."

(Saigon 538 to SecState, 5 September 196), p. 1 (Section 2)

(It is worth noting that this list of peasant grievances against the regime, like most such analyses, ^{by CIA or State} includes a number of separate factors, of which

"lack of protection against communist attacks and pressures" is only one.

This ^{is a} ~~speculation~~ of the peasant attitude toward the GVN ~~is not~~

~~against~~ (a) other analyses, particularly originating in the Department of Defense, ^{but also from} ~~but occasionally elsewhere, and character of Diem himself~~ ^{emphasizing} ~~that~~ lack of security ^{as} was the single significant peasant grievance, or the overwhelmingly predominant one, or the ^{basis of} ~~key~~ to the others; and (b) ^{effective} U.S. advice and influence, which increasingly centered upon the security problem.)

Urban groups, including labor and students (who were just beginning to show political ferment) were judged unlikely to begin a demonstration but increasingly likely to join one ^{begin} ~~than~~ by other oppositionists either within or outside the government. Dissatisfaction with the regime existed even among Catholic refugees, some of this stemming "paradoxically...from what they feel is too heavily Catholic leadership of regime (with potential reaction to follow)...." (This worry appeared less paradoxical in the summer of 1963.) ^{As for the Army:}

"...Some discontent exists because of political promotions and favoritism throughout armed forces structure. Some disturbing indications of possible development spirit frustration and defeatism in fight against Viet Cong also received, such as statement allegedly made by General Duong Van Minh that for every Viet Cong killed by armed forces government creating ten in their rear; however indications are that generals remain imbued by non-political approach and that discontent is not of such proportions that any general is ready to take initiative in leading coup. We cannot of course exclude emergences of a "Kong Le" from ranks below general but key units in and around Saigon are commanded by officers believed to be close and loyal to Diem."

(Saigon 538 to SecState, 5 September 1960, Section 2 of 2, p. 1)

(Two months later an abortive "Kong Le" coup came close to succeeding, led by LTC Nguyen Chanh Thi, one of those believed to have been most close and loyal to Diem.) ~~It was apparently launched on Thi's expectation.~~

The cable concluded that:"

"...Real possibility demonstrations in Saigon exists...any demonstration more likely to be initially loyal protests calling for changes in policies and personnel around Diem but could develop into anti-Diem riot...."

(Ibid, p. 2)

Ten days later, Durbrow sent a long analysis of the threats confronting Diem, with recommendations for counter-measures as a precursor to ^{presenting} ~~confronting~~ Diem with strong U.S. representations ^{on the need for} ~~for necessary~~ changes. This discussion well expressed the complex problems in which Diem was enmeshed, all of which had to be met adequately if the regime was to survive, and it was an unusually explicit listing of the sort of "reforms," so often alluded to since the Eisenhower letter of October, 1954, felt to be required if the Diem regime were to be politically viable.

"As indicated our 495 and 538 Diem regime confronted by two separate but related dangers, danger from demonstrations or coup attempt in Saigon could occur earlier; likely to be predominantly non-communistic in origin but communists can be expected to endeavor infiltrate and exploit any such attempt. Even more serious danger is gradual Viet Cong extension of control over countryside which, if current communist progress continues, would mean loss free Viet-Nam to communists. These two dangers are related because communist successes in rural areas embolden them to extend their activities to Saigon and because non-communist temptation to engage in demonstrations or coup is partly motivated by sincere desire prevent communist take-over in Viet-Nam.

"Essentially two sets of measures required to meet these two dangers. For Saigon danger essentially political and psychological measures required. For countryside danger security measures as well as political, psychological and economic measures needed. However both sets measures should be carried out simultaneously and to some extent individual steps will be aimed at both dangers."

(Saigon 624 to SecState, Section 1 of 2, 16 September 1960, p. 1)

The Ambassador proposed to "have frank and friendly talk with Diem and explain our serious concern about present situation and his political position."

"....I realize some measures I am recommending are drastic and would be most unpolitic for an Ambassador to make under normal circumstances. But conditions here are by no means normal. Diem government is in quite serious danger. Therefore, in my opinion prompt and even drastic action is called for. I am well aware that Diem has in past demonstrated astute judgment and has

survived other serious crises. Possibly his judgment will prove superior to ours this time, but I believe nevertheless we have no alternative but to give him our best judgment of what we believe is required to preserve his government. While Diem obviously resented my frank talks earlier this year and will probably resent even more suggestions outlined below, he has apparently acted on some of our earlier suggestions and might act on at least some of the following...."

(Ibid, p. 2)

Limiting his recommendations to the political and economic sphere, since other messages had dealt with security recommendations, Durbrow suggested measures, including:

"...Rumors about Mr. and Mrs. Nhu are creating growing dissension within country and seriously damage political position of Diem Government. Whether rumors true or false, politically important fact is that more and more people believe them to be true. Therefore, becoming increasingly clear that in interest Diem Government some action should be taken. In analagous situations in other countries us important, useful government personalities have had to be sacrificed for political reasons. I would suggest therefore that President might appoint Nhu to Ambassadorship abroad.

"...Similarly Tran Kim Tuyen, Nhu's henchman and Head of Secret Intelligence Service, should be sent abroad in diplomatic capacity because of his growing identification in public mind with alleged secret police methods of repression and control."

(Ibid., p. 3)

"...One or two cabinet ministers from opposition should be appointed to demonstrate Diem's desire to establish Government of National Union in fight against VC.

"...Make public announcement of disbandment of Can Lao Party or at least its surfacing, with names and positions of all members made known publicly. Purpose this step would be to eliminate atmosphere of fear and suspicion and reduce public belief in favoritism and corruption, all of which party's semi-covert status has given rise to.

"...Permit National Assembly wider legislative initiative and area of genuine debate and bestow on it authority to conduct, with appropriate publicity, public investigations of any department of government with right to question any official except President himself. This step would have three-fold purpose: (A) Find some

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mechanism for dispelling through public investigation constantly generated rumors about government and its personalities; (B) Provide people with avenue recourse against arbitrary actions by some government officials; (C) Assuage some of intellectual opposition to government.

"...Require all government officials to declare publicly their property and financial holdings and give National Assembly authority to make public investigation of these declarations in effort dispel rumors of corruption."

"...Adopt following measures for immediate enhancement of peasant support of government: (A) Establish mechanism for increasing price peasant will receive for paddy crop beginning to come on market in December, either by direct subsidization or establishment state purchasing mechanism; (B) Institute modest payment for all corvee labor; (C) Subsidize agrovillage families along same lines as land resettlement families until former on feet economically; (D) Increase compensation paid to youth corps. If Diem asks how these measures are to be financed I shall suggest through increased taxes or increased deficit financing, and shall note that under certain circumstances reasonable deficit financing becomes a politically necessary measure for governments. I should add that using revenues for these fundamental and worthy purposes would be more effective than spending larger and larger sums on security forces, which, while they are essential and some additional funds for existing security forces may be required, are not complete answer to current problems.

(Saigon 624 to SecState, Section 2 of 2, 16 September 1960, pp. 1-2).

Finally, in requesting State Department approval for an approach to Diem along these lines, Durbrow concluded with a recommendation on the nature of the political objectives the U.S. should set with respect to the GVN:

"We believe U.S. should at this time support Diem as best available Vietnamese leader, but should recognize that overriding U.S. objective is strongly anti-communist Vietnamese government which can command loyal and enthusiastic support of widest possible segments of Vietnamese people, and is able to carry on effective fight against communist guerrillas. If Diem's position in country continues deteriorate as result failure adopt proper political, psychological, economic and security measures, it may become necessary for U.S. government to begin consideration alternative courses of action and leaders in order achieve our objective."

(Ibid., p. 3)

In its reply (~~drafted by Chalmers Wood~~, Deptel 581 to Saigon, 7 Oct 60), the State Department concurred on the necessity of an approach to Diem on moves to increase his popular support. Among other comments, it was suggested that Durbrow state that after thorough study it was his "...carefully considered view GVN will face increasingly difficult internal political situation unless dramatic moves made to reverse present deteriorating trends. Small or gradual moves not repeat not adequate." On the question of Nhu and Tuyen, "since this important demarche would be most unpalatable," careful handling was stressed.

"....Agree main point should be that whether rumors true or false we are convinced that if they ignored, regime likely lose support it needs in struggle against Communists and that in all governments, such decisions have to be made....convinced decision regarding Nhu and Tuyen would remove major cause of resentment against regime. It would, we believe, increase support of Diem within the GVN and among the educated classes. Support these groups is as necessary as support of peasants...."

(Deptel 581 to ~~Amembassy~~ Saigon, 7 Oct 60) ~~pp 2 & 3~~

(The last statement was a highly unusual comment in ~~our~~ ^{OSG} internal analysis, then or now, though ~~the~~ ^{later} events of 1963 and ~~after~~ ^{have considered} show it to be ~~at the least~~ ^{an important question} ~~an important question~~ ^{merits.}) Among other suggestions, the Department proposed that Diem fix and announce a date on which villages would be asked to elect at least some of their own officials. In connection with Diem's program of agrovilles, the Department raised problems that were to recur repeatedly in the context of the later program in strategic hamlets.

"Suggest inform Diem we agree agrovillage program good way meet security problem but are concerned re execution. Urge he announce corvee labor on agrovilles and elsewhere be paid and agrovillage families receive some aid (possibly rice) during period readjustment (could be less than in High Plateau since Delta peasants still produce rice their own fields.) If he asks how such measures to be paid for, concur suggested reply re higher taxes and deficit financing. Devaluation should also be emphasized. Diem might announce heavier taxes on rich for benefit peasants and agrovillage program. You might inquire whether training program for Vietnamese administrators and technicians should be increased to provide personnel needed for agrovilles and other insecure areas. Also might inquire re status information teams assigned to explain to

(From these implied criticisms of ^{the} "execution," it could be ^{of the agrovilles} correctly -- ^{inferred} that ^{many} everyone of the defects in "implementation" ^{later} associated with the strategic hamlet program ^{was} already discernible in the administration of the agrovilles by the Diem regime.) ^{Durbrow's} One dissent by the Department from ^{Durbrow's} ~~proposed~~ recommendations was on ~~abolishing~~ the Can Lao:

"As to surfacing or abolishing Can Lao suggest that to ask for this and removal ~~Hue~~ and Tuyen simultaneously would be too much.... If considered necessary, question could be raised later."

(Ibid.) ~~p. 3~~

UHUS

On 14 October, the Ambassador had his opportunity for frank discussion alone with Diem. He began by reading, in French, a 14-page paper containing the suggestions agreed to by the Department.

"....Before reading text I stated that on October 13 I had been in Viet-Nam for three and one half years, had found my assignment edifying, interesting, and most worthwhile. I mentioned solid and worthwhile progress I had noted in country since 1957 and congratulated President on his many fine accomplishments. I then stated that since I admired his courage and determination I personally desired to do all I could to help him, particularly in these trying times. I added I personally, and other friends of his here as well as those in Washington, have been giving much thought about how we might be helpful to him. Results of our thinking led to conclusion that we could be most helpful if we should make several suggestions which I could put to him in a frank manner as a friend. I then read the paper.

"....When I finished reading President stated that most of suggestions I had made conformed to his basic ideas, but added as much as he would like to put these into effect, stepped-up activities of the Viet Cong made it most difficult. He added that many people have been intimidated by Viet Cong and some had been won over so that it would be difficult to carry out some of steps regarding countryside. I replied while I realized difficulties I was firmly convinced after most careful consideration that it essential now to take many if not all of these suggested steps on a calculated risk basis in order to create the psychological shock which I believed essential at this time. President made no further comment except to tell me that he would consider the suggestions I had given him.

"I then again begged his indulgence and asked if I could bring up a most sensitive and delicate matter which I felt in his interest and in interest of Viet-Nam I should discuss very frankly. From notes

in French which I read but did not leave with him, (copy by pouch) I discussed growing criticism of his brother and Madam Nhu, as well as Dr. Tuyen and suggested that they should be assigned abroad. Diem did not interrupt me but assumed somewhat grim, and I detected, slightly hurt manner. His only comment was that these rumors about the Nhuses were spread by communists. I replied that I was sure that communists were doing all they could to spread such rumors but I repeated that the unfortunate part about it is that more and more people are believing these reports - Vietnamese loyal to him, those who might be considered in the opposition, foreign civilians and foreign diplomats to say nothing of the press. I repeated, as I had previously, these reports were seriously damaging prestige of his regime.

"After discussing the Nhuses, I again apologized, first of all for bringing up this personal and sensitive subject, as well as the other suggestions I had made. I again asked his indulgence and forgiveness for speaking so frankly and added I hoped he would understand that I was talking as a sincere friend."

Saigon 802 to SecState, 15 October 1960 (corrected copy)

The same day, September 16, 1960, as the Ambassador's recommendations for a political demarche to Diem, the JCS informed CINCPAC and the Chief of MAAG that they and the Deputy SECDEF had approved a CINCPAC draft plan for counter insurgency operations by the Government of South Vietnam. This had its origins in CINCPAC's staff study of April 26, 1960, subsequently endorsed by the JCS on June 6, 1960 with the recommendations:

"a. That appropriate U.S. Government Departments and agencies encourage the Vietnamese and Laotian Governments to adopt a national emergency organization to integrate civil and military resources under centralized direction for the conduct of counter-insurgency operations.

"b. That these U.S. departments and agencies encourage the Vietnamese and Laotian Governments to develop coordinated national plans for the progressive reduction of Communist influence.

"c. That these U.S. Government departments and agencies be authorized and directed to support the training for and conduct of emergency operations...."

"e. That the U.S. Government provide sufficient materiel and budgetary support to insure the successful accomplishment of these emergency campaigns.

"The JCS also recommended that the Secretary of Defense initiate the action to obtain such U.S. Government support of counter-insurgency operations in Laos and Vietnam."

Continued

(CINCPAC study and JCS memorandum 232-60, June 6, 1960, enclosed in letter, Rear Admiral E. J. O'Donnell, USN (Director, Far East Region, ISA, Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense), to J. Graham Parsons (Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs), September 16, 1960, secret (file 611.51K); Cited in Department of State, Division of Historical Policy Research, Research Project No. 630, January 1965, Recent American Policy and Diplomacy Concerning Vietnam, 1960-1963, pp. 10-11.

In a subsequent memo for the Secretary of Defense (JCSM-382-60, dated August 30, 1960) the JCS asserted that

"encouraging the Government of South Vietnam to adopt a national course of action designed to reduce the growing threat of Communist insurgent actions" was vital to the continued freedom of that country and an important action 'to preclude the necessity for implementing U.S. or SEATO war plans.'"

(cited in Dept of State Research Project No. 630, January 1965, "Recent American Policy....", op. cit.)

The draft plan forwarded to MAAG stressed organizational matters, including the formation of a National Emergency Council and a Director of Operations to integrate civil and military efforts and formulate the Vietnamese National Counter-Insurgency Plan, with sub-councils at regional, provincial and village levels, but concluded with a concept of operations:

"(1) Politico/Military Operations. In order to provide protection which the people require, it is necessary to exercise more than an ordinary degree of control over the population. Among the more important operations required are those for exercising control in such manner as to isolate insurgents and sympathizers from the support of the populace. Such techniques as registration and identification, food control, and control of movement, should be implemented as offering the best prospects for success. Control measures instituted should require support by psychological warfare and information programs to gain and maintain popular confidence and support.

"(2) Military Operations. An effective continuing defensive system should remain in place, with a capability for reinforcing the permanent local security establishment since it is not sufficient temporarily to defeat or suppress insurgents or to establish control in one area and then move the counter-insurgency forces to a new area thus allowing insurgents to re-establish themselves. The regular military establishment of South Vietnam has the capability to fight either guerrillas or external aggressors. Militia type home guards and civil guards should be trained and equipped. Accelerated efforts should be undertaken to develop the para-military

and police forces. For the duration of the emergency campaign, operational control of all security activities should be under centralized direction. Border and Coastal Patrol operations, being fundamental to the campaign to prevent insurgents receiving support from areas outside of South Vietnam, should be closely coordinated with Vietnamese ground, air, and naval operations in the counter-insurgency campaign. These operations should also be coordinated with Cambodia and Laos, as feasible."

(Defense 982994 to CINCPAC, 162156Z Sep 60).

The State Department, accepting the recommendations of the Department of Defense, sent a State-Defense message instructing the Ambassador of the country team to develop an overall plan

"...for encouraging and supporting GVN in national emergency effort defeat insurgents and bring about order and stability in that country. Such action determined necessary in order check disruptive influences which could cause disintegration of the Government and the possible loss of South Viet-Nam to Communist Bloc."

(Deptel 658 to Amembassy Saigon, 19 Oct 60)

Before making known such a plan to the GVN it would be reviewed in Washington and a U.S. position established.

Two months after these somewhat differing analyses of the problem had been recorded an abortive coup by what had been regarded as among the most loyal troops and officers of ARVN, the airborne brigade, appeared to validate the concerns expressed by the State Department and the August 30 SNIE) ^{over} of non-communist dissatisfaction with the Diem regime. Yet the coup and its aftermath were to confirm not only the Ambassador but his critics within the DOD in their respective convictions.

Ambassador Durbrow described certain measures of reform promised by Diem after the coup but commented: ~~(1) the Ambassador reiterated his emphasis in September both upon the threat from non-communist quarters and the measures necessary to reduce it; however, it was apparent that one effect of the coup had been to make one of the most important measures, the transfer of Nhu, politically infeasible at the time.~~

"....It is hoped that these reforms are not just reforms on surface with little or no substance. Despite these signs, there is basically quite serious under-current malaise and skepticism whether effective reforms will be taken soon enough. This uneasy feeling not confined to intellectuals or opposition groups; but to sizeable number of others, i.e., cabinet Ministers, other loyal officials, deputies and some military. Nhu and Thuan have indicated that Diem, who not particularly interested fundamental political matters, is resisting some suggested basic reforms."

^{From}
(Saigon 1151 to SecState, 4 Dec 60,) ~~Section 1 of 2, pp. 1-2~~

The Ambassador reiterated his emphasis in ^{his} September ^{analysis} both upon the threat from non-communist quarters and the measures necessary to reduce it; however it was apparent that one effect of the coup had been to make one of the most important measures, the transfer of Nhu, politically infeasible at the time.

"Just below surface there is much talk about another coup unless Diem relaxes some controls, puts in effective reforms, takes more effective action to fight VC and give protection to population. There is still strong under-current of resentment against entourage but because any action he took this score would be under pressure and indicate weakness, and particularly his resentment of press stories about entourage, coupled with fact Diem feels he needs Nhu as loyal adviser, prospects Diem will transfer Nhu to other work or abroad not in sight, at least for some time. Despite this malaise and feeling about entourage, most critics still respect Diem as only leader at moment but this feeling could easily change unless he takes fairly drastic action to meet criticism and basic desires most strata population.

"We believe also that unless Diem takes early effective action on political front, coup has increased chances for development neutralism and for anti-Americanism among those critical of GVN. Despite our close identification with Diem and his regime critics have not to date bracketed us with government in expressing their dissatisfaction. Many have told us however that only we can induce Diem adopt changes which will save his regime, thus indicating they look to us to help them. If, after failure of clearly anti-Communist coup attempt to bring about changes we are not successful in inducing Diem to make peaceful changes, critics may well become frustrated, turn against U.S., seek other means bring about change and might even move toward neutralist position in middle. If Viet Cong guerrilla successes in countryside continue at rate registered during past year, this will also increase frustration of armed forces and population and could provide soil in which neutralism may grow."

(Ibid., pp. 2-3)

Since Diem was assuring the mission he was working on reforms, the Ambassador concluded "...we should not at moment press too hard," but it was still necessary to take appropriate opportunities to urge Diem and others to adopt at least the most important suggestions of his demarche of October 14; moreover, the Ambassador now emphasized the necessity for leverage, as well as persuasion, in inducing him both to institute political reforms and to accept the basic principles of the MAAG Counter Insurgency Plan:

"Since it far from certain Diem will introduce sufficiently appealing and effective new programs and use his present security forces in most efficacious manner, we must find suitable means to bring pressure on him. As I outlined in Embtel 1105 as well as in memorandum this subject (letter to Parsons Nov 8) I am convinced, even if we eventually should agree, that we should not now accord his request for 20,000 additional force or concur in his unilateral action to raise force level (Chief MAAG 1537 Dec 1 - copy JCS). To do so without his having relaxed controls, instituted effective reforms and having permitted efficient use present forces, would not save the day for Diem but might even induce him follow his instinct to rely primarily on use of force both to control population and fight VC. While I am not fully convinced need for extra 20,000 men, I would be willing to concur in such addition if careful study by all concerned concurred in this recommendation. (MAAG views on urgent need for 20,000 increase forwarded Parsons my letter Nov 30th) therefore, suggested this matter be carefully studied Washington and if final recommendation is favorable it be kept secret as ace in the hole to grant Diem provided he has taken other necessary steps which are to me much more fundamental, and provided he needs extra force after taking more essential steps. If, for instance, at the beginning next year he has taken effective steps along lines suggested above and it is still considered he needs increased force level we could so inform him then. But in meantime, in view his threat to raise force level unilaterally, I should be instructed soonest to taut suitable opportunity to state while force level increase is under consideration Washington cannot now see its way clear to grant such increase when other more important steps are essential at present in fight against VC and to make further progress Viet-Nam.

"In summary, situation in Viet-Nam is highly dangerous to US interests. Communists are engaged in large-scale guerrilla effort to take over countryside and oust Diem's Government. Their activities have steadily increased in intensity throughout this year. In addition Diem is faced with widespread popular dissatisfaction with his government's inability to stem the communist tide and its own heavy-handed methods of operation. It seems clear that if he is to remain in power he must

meet these two challenges by improvements in his methods of conducting war against communists and in vigorous action to build greater popular support. We should help and encourage him to take effective action: Should he not do so, we may well be forces, in not too distant future, to undertake difficult task of identifying and supporting alternate leadership."

(Saigon 1151 to SecState, 4 December 60 (Section 2 of 2)), pp. 2-3.

At the same time that Durbrow turned to an emphasis on pressure, his dispatch contained strong hints that U.S. ability to influence Diem and his immediate entourage without pressure might have declined as an immediate result of the abortive coup and the perceived relation of the U.S. to it.

"Nhu and Diem still deeply rankled particularly by critical American press stories about autocratic regime and entourage, and Diem made the ridiculous statement to Ladejinsky November 30th that he believes some Americans may have backed coup because one of coup leaders, Colonel Dong, 'told him so during negotiations.' This may represent rationalization blame others not selves....both Nhu and Diem now expressing deep displeasure because Americans equated Diem regime with rebels because both anti-Communists and therefore we urged both sides negotiate. While under circumstances their attitude understandable, we have made point clear to them that we did all in our power to prevent that he should be given active role in any government established...."

(Ibid., Section 1 of 2, p. 2.)

At best, a state of affairs in which Diem believed we had been sympathetic to a rebellion against him could only ^{be} ~~appear~~ ^{for} ominous to our relationship with him, and Durbrow implicitly acknowledged this in recommending a conciliatory gesture of reassurance, of a type that was to characterize our relations with the Diem regime in subsequent years:

"Since Diem believes we do not understand seriousness of VC ^(sic) ~~threat~~ and he suspects we may have encouraged rebels, we should make arrangements immediately to ship six H-34 helicopters which are not only most urgently needed fight VC effectively but would reassure Diem we trying give effective help."

(Ibid., Section 2 of 2, p. 2.)

In the eyes of those who regarded Diem as the indispensable kingpin of effective anti-communist policy in Vietnam and thus a mutual feeling of confidence and trust ^{between Diem & the U.S. of paramount importance,} ~~as paramount in our relationship with him,~~ such a gesture seemed pitifully inadequate -- and indeed Durbrow's continuing presence as Ambassador possibly counter-productive -- in the situation prevailing after the attempted coup

(Insert Lansdale memo)

Certainly, from this point of view, continued nagging, let alone stronger pressures, to win Diem's acceptance of political changes he did not want and which he ~~specifically~~ ^{specific} regarded as threats to the viability of his regime, could only be regarded as jeopardizing ^{Diem's} ~~the essential relation of confidence between Diem and the U.S. and thus any hopes of winning his cooperation~~ ^{This in turn imperilled} ~~in the military measures believed by others to be essential to the anti-~~ ^{crucial} ~~communist campaign.~~ ^{on} Nevertheless, the State Department endorsed the Ambassador's notions for continued representations to Diem on the urgency of political reforms, and instructed him to follow up his 14 October demarche on the liberalization of his regime. In his approach to Diem, the Department suggested the Ambassador follow the line:

"...Would prefer, for moment, put aside questions internal reforms GVN calculated primarily increase its efficiency (such as Internal Security Council) and focus on liberalization since any announcements GVN makes this subject will be matter great public interest...."

"....It Embassy's observation events November 11 and 12, whatever their cause, have led to increased atmosphere uneasiness and some doubt projected reforms will be adequate (Embtel 1151). This adds emphasis to basic premise against which, we believe, program of liberalization should be tested: it should be genuine, if limited, liberalization on

several fronts to be announced simultaneously....if liberalization not cut and genuine and not made on several fronts, public will feel deceived and GVN will lose rather than gain popular support...." 86

(Deptel 898 to Amembassy Saigon, 15 December 1960, pp. 1-2).

Department picked out several items from the 14 October demarche, including the right of the National Assembly to investigate the GVN; greater freedom for domestic press; better relations with the foreign press; and several rural measures.

Durbrow.. reported on the resulting conversation with Diem.

"....While Diem was pleasant during hour and three-quarters of discussions, he was basically negative. Diem did not reply to my remarks immediately but insisted essential have additional 20,000 troops since would do no good to try to put in reforms, build factories, roads and bridges, etc., unless these things and people could be protected. He referred several times to the need for 20,000 men stressing need because of deteriorating Lao situation. I then remarked we had just learned that he had increased force level of civil guard to 64,000 and asked if this increase would not fill security force needs. Diem replied civil guard not trained so needs bring back 20,000 reservists. He asked that I urge Dept to give favorable consideration force level request and I reiterated matter under careful study in Washington...."

(Saigon 1216 to SecState, December 24, 1960, pp. 1-2).

When the Ambassador told Diem of approval to give him eleven H-34 helicopters as soon as possible, "he made no comment." He rejected notions that the Assembly might investigate executive departments (dismissing Durbrow's comment that we have the same system in America) and then commented on the Department's earlier recommendations with respect to the agroville program:

"....Although I had not mentioned corvee labor this time, Diem stated this only way collect equivalent of taxes from peasants and that this system is in Vietnamese tradition, but peasants in Cochinchina under French had not been asked to contribute labor. Therefore they now resent corvee labor and of course would not think of paying any monetary taxes. He pointed out peasants in central Viet-Nam willingly contribute free labor instead of taxes. I remarked one reason for discontent in south is arbitrary action of officials and the failure to explain needs to peasants before forcing them to

work. Diem insisted peasants had been told of needs but they just lazy."

(Ibid., p. 3)

(In view of Diem's expressed attitudes in this area, and the actual practice of his regime in implementing the agrovillage program, there was scarcely a basis for surprise when US-urged provisions for paying peasants for their labor on the strategic hamlets went generally unfulfilled.)

Durbrow's report left little doubt that a process of persuasion in pursuit of liberalizing reforms that Durbrow and State -- but not Diem, or, it would appear, MAAG or the DOD -- believed essential to continued stability and an effective anti-communist campaign, had reached an impasse, in the absence of more forceful U.S. pressures:

"On few occasions he let me talk, I urged he adopt reforms soonest since it essential to win further support of the people if Viet Cong menace is to be overcome, but he gave me no indication of reforms he may adopt. Before leaving I again expressed hope that he would accept our suggestion that he announce all liberalizing programs at one time in order to make best impact. Diem replied he would think about this but made no commitment.

"Comments. We have heard that Nhu, Thuan and others have been running into resistance when urging Diem to adopt worthwhile reforms. I also received impression he very reluctant to adopt reforms and is still basically thinking in terms of force to save the day, hence his insistence several times that we approve force level increase and his action raising civil guard ceiling by 10,000. While I still believe it absolutely essential he adopt more liberal programs, it is not certain from his attitude and remarks that he will take effective action in these matters, although I learned later he has agreed to engage the services of a public relations expert suggested by CAS to make a survey of GVN foreign public relations needs."

(Ibid., pp. 3-4)

IV
1961: The Kennedy Program

The CIP

On January 4, 1961, Ambassador Durbrow forwarded to Washington the Despatch counter insurgency plan for Vietnam (Saigon/276, 4 Jan 61) consisting of a basic plan and three annexes on RVNAF force increase, concepts of operations and logistics. The recommendations and discussions dealt

predominantly with military measures:

"....extraordinary action by the GVN to:

- a. Further develop a national emergency operations control system....
- b. Implement the National Planning System.
- c. Implement the plan for a national intelligence organization and system with particular emphasis on obtaining information at the village level, and integrating effort at the national level.
- d. Fully employ military capabilities to include strengthening and reorganizing military command and control channels.
- e. Establish a border/coastal surveillance system.
- f. Improve the civil and military communications system.
- g. Reduce attrition rate of armed forces and utilize the trained manpower pool."

(Saigon despatch 276, 4 Jan 61, pp. 17-18).

It further proposed to expand the force level of ARVN by 20,000 men; and provide logistical support for 32,000 of the Civil Guard. Although the plan referred to political problems of discontent with the Diem Government (drawing in part upon the discussion in the 30 August SNIE), emphasis on military problems was reflected in its statement: "The principal task facing the GVN is the restoration of individual security.... military force, in the form of increased communist insurgency is clearly the major immediate threat to the stability of Vietnam today...."

"The problem is twofold, although at present the counter-insurgency phase is the more dangerous and immediate. In this counterinsurgency fight RVNAF is on the defensive. Approximately 75% of ARVN is committed to pacification missions, about half of these being committed to static guard and security roles. The military chain of command has usually been violated at the expense of unity of effort and command. No adequate operations control or overall planning system presently exists, although significant progress has been made in the development of military plans. The President has exercised arbitrary control of operations, by-passing command channels of the JCS and often Corps and Division staffs. Resources have been fragmented to provincial

control. The above practices appear to have been designed to divide responsibility in order to guard against the possibility of a military coup through placing too much power in the hands of a single subordinate. The guerrilla problem has become much more serious than the Civil Guard can manage, thereby requiring a disproportionately large RVNAF commitment, which has further resulted in a serious weakening of the RVNAF capability for defense against internal or overt attack in force. Rotation within RVNAF and Civil Guard cannot be accomplished regularly. Many units have been on operations for a year or more without relief, because RVNAF strength is insufficient to permit an adequate rotation policy and to conduct adequate border and coastal surveillance. Many troops are battle weary, in a state of low morale, and in need of recuperation and training...."

(Ibid., pp. 5-6)

Assumptions underlying the plan were stated:

"(1) That the greatest immediate threat to the continued existence of the Republic of Viet-Nam is posed by the steady expansion of guerrilla warfare by the Vietnamese Communists, with the Mekong Delta as a political and military base.

"(2) That North Viet-Nam has the capability of supporting guerrilla operations in SVN by infiltrating regular forces and cadres to strengthen locally recruited elements. (Guerrilla forces have increased from 3,500 to an ARVN estimate of 9,800 during 1960.)

"(3) That at the present time the Diem Government offers the best hope for defeating the Viet Cong threat.

"(4) That the Government of Viet-Nam has the basic potential to cope with the Viet Cong guerrilla threat if necessary corrective measures are taken and adequate forces are provided.

"(5) That the gravity of this threat will continue until a maximum offensive and coordinated retaliatory effort is made by civil and military authorities.

"(6) That the most vital consideration of US policy in Viet-Nam is to create governmental stability by the eradication of insurgency in the Republic of Viet-Nam and to that end the activities of all US agencies will be coordinated.

"(7) That the Viet Cong, in coordination with the communist parties of Laos and Cambodia, will continue to build up a maximum effort against the Republic of Viet-Nam. The April '61 elections constitute particularly critical period.

"(8) That the DRV has a current continuing military capability for external aggression against SVN."

(Ibid., pp. 12-13).

Very mechanistic approach. The human factor is missing. How to increase the V.C. appeal? How to increase the GVN appeal? The DRV would be a serious problem. We have an answer to these two preliminary questions.

In the field of political tasks to achieve these ends, the plan simply referred to the Embassy and other Department dispatches discussed above relating to the _____ demarche by Durbrow and the later discussions in December. ^P Discussion by the Ambassador of the country teams proposals, and the plan, ~~a covering cable, implicitly breaking them down~~ ^{a covering cable presented a broken-down plan,} (other than those already agreed to by SVN, such as transfer of the Civil Guard to the GVN Department of Defense) ~~a covering cable, implicitly broken down~~ into three categories:

a. Measures that Diem had, in fact, requested, ^{and that} ~~such~~ required U.S. action; principally the proposed 20,000-man increase in ARVN.

b. Measures which the GVN currently had "under study" or which would shortly be presented to the GVN but on which foot-dragging and some resistance could be expected; such as implementation of a firm military chain of command (in particular, willingness by Diem to cease by-passing his military staff and commanders in dealing with province chiefs and subordinate commanders); establishment of a military operational command for counter-insurgency operations and development of a national plan for counter-insurgency.

c. Recommendations "considered by the country team to be indispensable and in the GVN's own best interests," but which would "probably not be particularly palatable to the GVN;" this situation pertains ^{is} particularly to certain political actions and concepts of the military-civilian relationship. ~~For~~ ^{For} example, strengthening the role of the National Assembly, and including respected oppositionists in the Cabinet.)

Differences between Durbrow's covering cable, ^{the} ~~his~~ dissenting footnote by the Chief MIA and the ~~author~~ of the Counter Insurgency Plan (CIP) ^{at all} show clearly a disagreement over ~~principles~~ ^{principles} and tactics that had been

evidenced earlier in 1960 and that was to persist among U.S. decision-makers through 1961. Durbrow's position, reflected in later, similar dispatches between State Dept. and the President himself was that the unpalatable political measures aimed at "liberalizing" the regime were essential to the achievement of U.S. (and GVN) ^{goals} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ Vietnam. Therefore, in the face of resistance to such measures by Diem it was necessary to assert some leverage to win his acceptance; and the most expedient means of leverage would be to ^{2.} ~~police~~ ^{postpone} or threaten withholding of those measures of support that Diem actually wanted, until Diem should have complied with our aims in the political area. ~~¶~~ In the case of the program represented by the CIP, this could only mean withholding approval of part or all of the funding for the 20,000 man force level increase that Diem (and the MAAG) had requested. Earlier, Durbrow ^{may have} ~~had~~ turned to this tactic ~~as the~~ ~~most likely~~ because of a suspicion that the 20,000-man increase was not really essential. ^{By} ~~in~~ January 1961 he was prepared to agree on the ^{need} ~~require-~~ ~~ment~~ for additional troops (referring to the increasing threat posed by the Soviet airlift in Laos), but ^{he} still pointed to the tactical requirement somehow of inducing Diem to take the unpalatable political actions. "These questions are an integral part of the overall plan and are essential to its successful accomplishment. Consideration should, therefore be given to what actions we are prepared to take to encourage or, if necessary to force, acceptance of all essential elements of the plan."

A MAAG footnote to the Ambassador's reference to a ~~new~~ ^{now} requirement for additional troops asserted:

"a. The military requirement for this force increase to accomplish the current mission had been demonstrated in MAAG considered ~~opinion~~ as early as August 1960. This force increase was badly needed before the beginning of the Soviet airlift in Laos. The recent ~~aggression~~ ^{aggression} against Laos merely reinforces

this requirement.

"b. The four divisions in the North in I and II Corps areas are committed in anti-guerrilla and static guard duty to an extent which not only cuts down their capability to resist overt attack and thus magnifies the risk to a militarily unacceptable degree, but also prohibits required training to adequately counter either external or internal aggression.

"c. Additionally, the force increase will provide the long needed balance between combat and logistic support."

(Ibid., pp. 2-3)

A considerable part of the discussion from the CIP -- including one long annex -- was devoted to justifying the essentiality of the enlarged force level for RVNAF, emphasizing that action must be taken to implement the increase as quickly as possible, since from one to two years ^{would} ~~will~~ be required to fill the new units. It could be foreseen that those who saw the Viet Cong threat as most ^{important} ~~urgent~~ (which was the basic tone of the CIP, and subsequently of the DOD), and who regarded as most urgent military measures against this threat ^{including} ~~including~~ measures that would require increased acceptance and cooperation by Diem, would be impatient with "pressure tactics" that were ^{likely to produce} ~~encountered to induce~~ a forthcoming attitude from Diem on the military reorganization they regarded as essential. And ^{they} ~~they~~ would, in particular, be hostile to such tactics when they involved delays on "vital" military matters in the hope of winning concessions from Diem in political areas that seemed peripheral or trivial in the context of the communist insurgency. (To anticipate discussion of the events of the subsequent year: President Kennedy tended to accept the State Dept view of the importance of political reforms, to the extent of instructing the Ambassador, on several occasions, to offer increased U.S. assistance ^{only} ~~in~~ exchange for the cuid pro suo of political reforms by Diem. However, faced

uniformly with a negative attitude by Diem toward such measures, and indeed ^{toward} with the idea of any quid pro quo whatever, these conditions for increased aid were eventually dropped in each case in the interests of expeditious measures to halt a further deterioration in the immediate military situation in Vietnam.)^R A factor tipping the scales toward what might be called the Diem/MAAG/DOD priorities in each instance was the coincident, and increasing, need to "reassure" Diem of U.S. support for Vietnam and for him personally, in the light of events that had shaken that assurance (and hence Diem's willingness to cooperate on less controversial measures) such as, in Diem's eyes, U.S. relation to the abortive November 1960 coup, U.S. pressures via Durbrow for political reforms in the Spring of 1961, and, above all, U.S. policy with respect to Laos. This need to reassure Diem was at cross purposes with the use of pressure tactics to influence him and, in part, conflicted with the U.S. desire to have Diem adopt moves (such as delegating authority to a single military commander, or include oppositionists in his cabinet) that he regarded as directly threatening continuation of his rule.^{TP} On 30 January 1961 a memo from the President to the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense noted that as a result of their meeting on 28 January he had authorized

"....an increase of expenditure of \$28.4 million to expand the Viet-Nam force level by 20,000; and an increase in expenditure of \$12.7 million for a program to improve the quality of the Viet-Nam civil guard."

These figures represented the dollar costs of the increases recommended in CIP.

(Footnote: The author, Benjamin Bock, of the State Department Study: *The United States and Diplomacy Concerning Vietnam, 1960-1963*, Research Project #630, January 1965, notes that Chalmers V. Wood, the Vietnamese desk officer in the 1961 period,

had told him in June 1963 that President Kennedy had personally approved the Counter Insurgency Plan).

In passing on this authorization from the President in a Joint State-Defense-ICA message, the Department pointed out

"....U.S. would as Plan provides expect GVN absorb local currency costs these increases and does not contemplate further US-? dollar grants to generate additional local currency for this purpose."

(Joint State-Defense-ICA Message, Deptel 1054 to Saigon, 3 Feb 61), p. 1

The Department suggested that the Ambassador and the Chief MAAG prepare an abridged version of the plan to present to Diem and emphasized

"....Immediate purpose Plan is to enable GVN defeat insurgency, but Plan also envisages that GVN must move on political front towards liberalization to retain necessary popular cooperation; that various economic steps be taken; and that there be adequate cooperation with RKG on frontier control. It considered US view that success requires implementation entire plan."

"...Future funding will require Congressional approval. Views Congress likely be influenced by developments in political as well as security situation. FY 61 component represents large increase in US support Viet-Nam. If GVN willing to accept the obligations involved in its implementation, the US is ready give full and immediate support in carrying it out."

(Ibid., pp. 1-2.)

In a passage suggesting some naivete on the part of the Department as to actual working procedures and the ^{retention} ~~retention~~ of negotiations in Saigon, the Department suggested:

"...proposing to Diem that members US Missions ready confer with GVN opposite numbers work out agreed version Plan within, say, two week time limit...." (Ibid, p. 2)

The guidance concluded:

"If Ambassador considers GVN ^{does} ~~not~~ not provide necessary cooperation, he should inform Washington with recommendations which may include suspension US contribution." (Ibid, p. 3)

The Ambassador and the Chief of the MAAG carried out these directions in an interview with Diem and Thuan, Secretary of State for the Presidency in an interview on February 13, 1961. Both Diem and Thuan expressed concern as to how they could finance the local currency costs for the additional 20,000 men. The Ambassador expressed his firm conviction that by taking "extraordinary measures" the Vietnamese government could raise sufficient piasters. When Thuan asked what the U.S. position would be if the Vietnamese could not see their way to finance the plan as a whole, the Ambassador replied that the plan was a "comprehensive document" and therefore all facets should "basically be carried out." The Ambassador reported that he was "not very sanguine" that an agreed plan could be worked out by the end of February. (From Saigon Deptel 1367, 13 Feb 61, summarized in State Department Research Project No. 630, op. cit., p. 15).

A month later, Ambassador Durbrow discussed the status of GVN acceptance of the CIP with Thuan. On the political measures

"....He repeated question of bringing opposition members into cabinet would depend on whether such persons would agree with government policy. I replied I felt certain GVN would find loyal oppositionists who would be in basic agreement with policy and therefore urged this step be taken. Thuan expressed skepticism. He repeated legislative investigation of executive only practiced in US, therefore GVN would not accept this suggestion...."

(Saigon 1454 to SecState, 11 Mar 61, p. 1)

On March 16 Durbrow raised the subject of the CIP with Diem; by this time it was clear that agreement was being reached on the main military CIP suggestions to a degree "which MAAG considers it can live with provided GVN follows through with proper implementation," but the GVN position on other "fundamental" (in Durbrow's eyes) CIP suggestions -- i.e., in the

political sphere -- was not yet clear. (Saigon Deptel 1466, to SecState, 16 March 1961). Durbrow enumerated these remaining questions:

"(1) We believe it important to attain further national unity that Diem make reasonable offer take one or two non-commie oppositionists into cabinet.

"(2) I stated we still receiving allegations and rumors about Can Lao Party secret activities which, whether true or not, are harmful to GVN. I again urged that party come out in open or dissolve itself and suggested might be worthwhile pass law or issue decree stating against law have any secret parties Viet-Nam, pointing out this would help give legal basis act against various secret parties even covert communist-front organizations.

"Diem interrupted me at this point to describe what he called favorable evolution among non-communist oppositionists which now taking place. He stated many of those who took part in coup see errors their ways and now realize if they had won they would have only assisted communist take-over. According Diem most oppositionists, whether those arrested because of coup or others, now in process changing their attitude and realize it in national interests they try to work more closely with GVN. For this reason too soon to make offer cabinet posts to oppositionists but, without making firm promise, he stated that if some non-commies could agree basic policy GVN he might take them into government after election.

"He did not directly reply to my Can Lao suggestion but stated that more and more oppositionists and public in general coming to realize allegations and rumors re party are not true. I interjected these developments all more reason why Can Lao Party should come into open or dissolve and why he should seriously make reasonable offers non-communists enter govt. Diem made no promises."

(Saigon Deptel 1466 to SecState, 16 Mar 61, Section 1 of 2, p. 2)

In connection with the proposed Central Intelligence organization, Diem stated he had finally chosen an officer to run this; on the issue of better relations with the Cambodian Government, to the end of working out border control arrangements, Diem was, as always, very negative on the possibilities. Raising once more the issue of dealings with the peasants in connection with agrovilles:

"I again would like to make modest payments to peasants called upon to live in agrovilles, particularly those for instance who work on agrovilles but would not live there and would thus get no

benefit from their labor. Diem replied peasants everywhere except those in Cochin-China area gladly contributed to community development. He added if he tried to tax them it would cause more disgruntlement. He argued even those who did not get into agrovilles received considerable benefits from establishment nearby markets, schools, hospitals and maternity wards. I stated that while this undoubtedly true, corvee labor was one of principal things used by communists to cause disgruntlement Delta."

(Ibid., Section 2 of 2, pp. 2-3).

~~(This exchange, almost identical with others of several months earlier, suggests~~

The Ambassador concluded with the following:

"Comments: Diem was most affable, exuded confidence and for first time expressed some gratitude our CIP efforts which he promised implement as best he could. Again before giving full green light believe we should await outcome detail discussion by GVN-US officials. In meantime MAAG quietly ordering some equipment for 20,000 increase (Embtel 1444)."

(Ibid., Section 2 of 2, p. 4).

~~the~~ NIE of 28 March 1961 (NIE 50-61: Outlook in Mainland SEA)

indicated that the adverse trends described ominously in the SNIE of August 60 had persisted, as had the dual threats of internal non-Communist oppositionist and VC pressures.

"An extremely critical period for President Ngo Dinh Diem and the Republic of Vietnam lies immediately ahead. During the past six months the internal security situation has continued to deteriorate and has now reached serious proportions. Communist North Vietnam has stepped up its covert direction and support of the Viet Cong, its paramilitary arm in South Vietnam, and intensified its political and propaganda pressures on South Vietnam. During this same period, non-Communist political opposition to Diem and his regime has developed markedly, and there are increasing signs of dissatisfaction within the Vietnamese military establishment. Both factors were involved in the abortive coup d'etat of last November.

"....Local recruits and sympathetic or intimidated villagers have enhanced Viet Cong control and influence over increasing areas of the countryside. For example, more than one-half of the entire rural region south and southwest of Saigon, as well as some areas to the north, are under considerable Communist control. Some of these areas are in effect denied to all government authority not immediately backed by substantial armed force. The Viet Cong's strength encircles Saigon and has recently begun to move closer in on the city. There has been an increase in guerrilla activity in the central highlands, notably in regions directly bordering on Laos. The guerrillas have increased their terrorist attacks on villagers and local officials....."

"...The deterioration in the position of the Diem government reached a new extreme in November when army paratroop officers joined forces with a number of civilian oppositionists in a narrowly defeated attempt to overthrow Diem. On the surface, Diem's position appears to have improved somewhat since then...."

"....However, the factors which gave rise to the coup attempt have not been seriously dealt with and still exist. Discontent with the Diem government continues to be prevalent among intellectual circles and, to a lesser degree, among labor and business groups. There has been an increasing disposition within official circles and the army to question Diem's ability to lead in this period. Many feel that he is unable to rally the people in the fight against the Communists because of his reliance on virtual one-man rule, his toleration of corruption extending even to his immediate entourage, and his refusal to relax a rigid system of public controls. Moreover, the people in the countryside are becoming increasingly disillusioned regarding the government's ability to protect them from depredations and taxation by the Viet Cong."

"The Vietnamese Army has also been affected by the present political situation. A significant part of the November coup group came from hitherto trusted army units. In view of this and the apparent hesitancy of some top military leaders to act quickly in his support, Diem is now more suspicious of the army as a potentially serious source of antigovernment activity. The coup attempt has probably opened the eyes of many army officers to their political potential."

"The key issue facing the Diem government over the next six months arises from the Communist internal threat. If the army is able to make substantial progress toward subduing the Viet Cong guerrillas, the political position of the government will be substantially improved. However, if there is no discernible improvement in the internal security situation and Diem continues to be arbitrary in dealing with the military and government leaders, their support for Diem will become increasingly uncertain. There would be growing likelihood of a definite split in the army and government leadership between those backing Diem and those opposed to him. Such a situation would substantially add to the regime's instability and increase the prospect for another coup attempt."

"Given Diem's precarious political situation and the strength of Communist guerrilla and subversive pressures, we believe that the odds favor a second coup attempt sometime in the next year or so. The Communists would like to initiate and control a coup against Diem, and their armed and subversive operations including 'united front' efforts are directed toward this purpose. It is more likely, however, that any coup attempt which occurs over the next year or so will originate among non-Communist elements, perhaps a combination of disgruntled civilian officials and oppositoinists and army elements, broader than those involved in the November attempt. If such a coup appeared to have good prospects of succeeding, various groups such as the sects and labor unions probably would join in. We believe that if this were to happen such a coup attempt would have a better than even chance of succeeding."

"....Hanoi would seek to exploit the confusion attending a revolutionary change of government in South ~~Vietnam~~ Vietnam and it is uncertain that the army would be able to keep the situation from getting out of hand."

(NIE 50-61, 28 March 1961, pp. 7 & 8.)

(NIE 50-61, 28 March 1961, pp. 7 & 8.)

The persisting and growing danger of a military coup, of course, ~~was~~ ^{was} ~~caught~~ against MAAG desires, expressed in the CIP, that Diem decentralize military decision-making and give greater authority to a field command. Yet, to the extent that such a delegation was essential to military

success, and such success in ~~turn~~ turn essential to reduce the dissatisfaction and military and civilian officials, Diem's prudent concentration of power in his own hands could worsen the ultimate prospects of the stability ~~of~~ of his regime.

~~Or the [unclear] that the NIE [unclear] emerged~~
P 28 March 1961, Lt General T.J.H. Trapnell submitted a report

and 10 recommendations to the JCS based on a recent trip to Vietnam. His recommendations were along the lines of the counter-insurgency plan, which he urged that the U.S. Government support, but already went further in a number of practical respects. In particular, he recommended that:

"...sufficient U.S. Defense Support Funds be provided to support 170,000 force on same basis as 150,000. Approval of the CIP carries with it a requirement to provide MAP support, but not local currency support, of the 20,000 increase over the present 150,000 strength. Presently, the RVNAF (150,000) is provided piastre budget support from US Defense Support funds for pay allowances and food. The failure to provide additional US financial aid could seriously jeopardize the complete acceptance and in particular the implementation and execution of the CIP."

(JCSM-202-61, 31 Mar 61, w/Attachment, Memo for Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 28 Mar 61, Subject: South Vietnam), p. 7 of Atchmt.

Earlier, he noted that the

"...counterinsurgency plan must be accepted by GVN and US before MAP funds will be released to support the plan. I concur with the Country Team position -- that the CIP must be supported by the US and accepted and implemented by GVN if anything at all is to be done to prevent the collapse of the Diem government. To date Diem has accepted about 80% of the CIP."

(Ibid., pp. 4-5)

Trapnell argued, then, that the U.S. should accede to the GVN's desire that the U.S. bear full costs, including local currency for the 20,000 man increase the GVN had requested, as a means of getting GVN acceptance of the CIP as a whole, which he regarded as essential to preserving the internal security of Vietnam. (It can be inferred from his report, which deals exclusively with military and intelligence matters, that it was these aspects of the CIP that Trapnell regarded as crucial.) But this tactic, of course, ran directly counter to the strategy of Ambassador Durbrow who proposed to withhold "the green light" on this military item, almost the only one for which Diem had shown a real desire, in order to get acceptance by

militar

Diem of other, non-~~communist~~ measures in the CIP, which he was particularly unlikely to accept without pressure of this sort. On 11 April, 1961, after receiving comments from CINCPAC, the JCS accepted most of Trapnell's recommendations, including this one:

"....The Joint Chiefs of Staff have taken due cognizance of the primary functions and responsibilities assigned to the State Department and ICA in determining the source and allocation of Defense Support funds. However, the Government of Vietnam apparently feels it cannot provide the financial support required in the Counterinsurgency Plan. Furthermore, the Joint Chiefs of Staff feel that prompt acceptance of the Counterinsurgency Plan by the Government of Vietnam is a matter of overriding concern in that country's present critical situation. Therefore, the Joint Chiefs of Staff request the Secretary of Defense to take action to the end that Defense Support funds are provided for a 170,000 man force on the same basis as that now provided for 150,000."

(JCSM-228-61, 11 Apr 61, p. 2)

In discussions both by Trapnell and the JCS, it would appear that "acceptance of the CIP" meant, to all practical purposes, acceptance of the ~~proposals on~~ *proposals on* the ~~military position for~~ *military position* force level and reorganization. In any case, it was clear that in their eyes, the need for early acceptance of the military provisions outweighed any considerations of their possibilities as levers.

The JCS also concurred in less controversial recommendations by Trapnell to provide MAP support for the entire 68,000 Civil Guard, and to provide certain items of supply. They then obliquely indicated an approach to influence ^{wa} the GVN, ^{pressure} alternative to Dubrow's ~~tactics of pressure~~ *tactics of pressure*.

"The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that the increased US contributions to the Government of Vietnam, proposed above, be appropriately exploited by US representatives in Vietnam to induce that government's acceptance of the Counterinsurgency Plan."

This sequence of tactics was to recur at various Stages in our dealing with the Diem Government and ^{its successor} ~~other~~ governments. An initial attempt at ~~large, tenuous~~, conditional offers ^{To} ~~an~~ Diem ^{in return for} ~~for~~ quid pro quo ^{were} followed (often because ~~pacification~~ circumstances arose that required the U.S. to take special moves to ^{reassure} ~~reinforce~~ the ^{regime} ~~terrain~~, or because urgent short run ^{development} ~~circumstances~~ seemed to require that we meet the GVN's request ^{immediately} ~~for increased support~~ ^{by all means}. _____ of the U.S. resources or support in question without strings but with a hope that these gestures would be rewarded by a forthcoming attitude on the part of the GVN (rarely fulfilled).

One other recommendation by Trapnell was that U.S. influence on military matters should be exerted entirely through military rather than "country team" (ambassadorial) ^{channels}. Trapnell questioned the country team concept giving the Ambassador, as Chief of the American mission, broad powers of "active coordination over all U.S. elements in the country," in a situation like that of Vietnam's," which he defined, significantly, as a "hot war" situation.

"....The problem is one of military problems being reviewed by the Country Team and changes made -- not for political or economic reasons -- but on purely military grounds. This over control and coordination of pure military matters by the Country Team has sometimes delayed, thwarted or precluded military plans or recommendations of Chief MAAG which he, in his considered professional opinion, felt were necessary in the best interests of the US in furthering US goals. When the internal security situation in a country deteriorates to the point where it is obvious that military action or intervention is the only answer; I feel that the Country Team concept of control and coordination under the Ambassador should not apply and that pure military matters should be the responsibility of the senior US officer in the country concerned. Military directives should not come through the Ambassador for his review but directly through military channels in order that military directives and policy decisions will not be influenced by non-military thinking and direction in a hot war situation." (JCS: 202-61, 31 Mar 61, Attachment, p. 5)

Typical of the military approach, failure to realize that military action of a policy nature is not military.

Although the JCS took no immediate position on this issue pending study of the ~~the~~ ^{OSD}, DOD was later to adopt this position, and it was embodied ultimately imposed in the creation of MACV. with a U.S. commander having direct access to the President and U.S. military channels for military matters. But later discussions gave little attention -- any more than ~~did~~ this initial statement by Trapnell -- to the point of view that a war like that in Vietnam ^{might} ~~would~~ differ from the familiar "hot wars" of the past, in ~~ways~~ ^{ways} ~~that~~ ^{which they} made "non-military thinking and direction" relevant and desirable even in the tactical military sphere. Thus, for example, Trapnell notes as one major reason for the lack of an adequate intelligence capability in Vietnam:

"....The civilians in the countryside are too frequently reluctant to pass information due either to a lack of motivation or to Viet Cong intimidation caused by the internal security situation"

(Ibid., p. 3)

important

A frequent characteristic of DOD analyses (though not all) was to ignore the ^{political} implications of an alleged "lack of motivation" in its political aspects, ~~or else to regard this problem as essentially equivalent to the~~ ^{looking at the problem of information - giving only in} ~~second reason given of~~ "Viet Cong intimidation," ^{handled} ~~adequately would be reduced~~ ^{thus} by improving security.

On the military side, Trapnell noted:

"...RVNAF has not been successful in eliminating Communist insurgents in South Vietnam. Many factors have contributed to this failure which include improper employment, lack of adequate forces, lack of training, open borders, defensive operations, and poor leadership. In addition to these military weaknesses, the President's arbitrary control of operations, by-passing command channels and fragmentation of military resources has also adversely affected operations."

(Ibid., pp. 3-4)

There was a tendency in military analyses, both in the CIP and ~~in later ones~~, to address remedial measures in particular to two items out of this list, the force level and organizational weaknesses. (The complaint about the President's interference often on political grounds in military matters, is interestingly parallel to Trapnell's complaint about interference by the civilian ambassador on the U.S. side.) There was no doubt that lack of a national plan was at the least a symptom of the lack of well established priorities for allocating national resources ^{commands} to meet the problems of insurgency; and the profusion of comments and conflicting authorities did not promote efficient coordination of resources at the fighting level. As the CIP pointed out:

"...At present, reporting to the President, there are 38 Province Chiefs, by-passing all military authority; there are 3 Military Region Commanders, by-passing the Joint Staff and Field Command; and 1 Commanding General, Field Command. With 43 people, each responsible for pacification within his own sphere of responsibility, reporting direct to the President, it is little wonder that unity of effort has been dissipated."

(Amemb Saigon Despatch 276, Counter Insurgency Plan for South Viet-Nam, Annex B-III-A-6)

Nevertheless, the experience of the subsequent six years of ARVN performance -- during the last four of which there has been no problem of civilian, Presidential interference with a military chain of command, or province chief autonomy vis-a-vis division commanders -- raises the question whether there was not an excessive belief among U.S. military officers in 1961 that the organizational measures they stressed were a panacea to the many ills of RVNAF. Was it realistic, even in 1961, to believe that assigning clear cut authority to Big Minh and persuading Diem to keep his hands off battalion commanders was going greatly to reduce "improper employment" or "defensive operations" or to solve or even

In 1959-60
looking at the
behavior of
Vietnamese
officers, it
became evident
to me that you
cannot fight a
"defensive"
operation
without
the ARVN was
and still is
despite the
substance in
the draft.

compensate for the problem of poor leadership at subordinate levels?

The same question could be raised about some of the political measures proposed by Durbrow and the State Department addressed to the problem of improving political support for the Diem regime. Was it realistic to believe that putting a few token oppositionists into cabinet positions -- almost surely to be ignored and frustrated by Diem -- or holding more press conferences for Vietnamese or U.S. reporters, would have reached very far in meeting the real political needs of the regime? In fact, without a basic change, somehow achieved, in Diem's old style of conducting the day to day affairs of his administration, and perhaps even a change in his basic philosophy, would changes in the formal structure or composition of his administration have meant more than the ^{people} changes to which he did agree in the fields of intelligence and military organization, which in actual fact he felt free to ignore or to fail to implement?

In any case, both the Embassy and State Department, on the one hand, and MAAG and the DOD on the other, believed that radical changes in organization and operation were essential to the achievement of joint US/GVN goals for maintaining stability and suppressing the insurgency. They differed in the measures to which they gave priority -- and this difference was sometimes obscured by the fact that all parties referred to "desirable reforms" -- but they were agreed on the absolute necessity for kinds of change that the Diem regime was highly reluctant to implement. All, then, faced the issue of how to influence the regime to accept these changes. Four major tactics were pressed by one or another:

True, I am certain that many of these oppositionists would not have even the impact that I have had as a civil servant on the GVN decision making process.

(b) Not a means for showing the top level
(c) could work only temporarily, as a means for showing the top level
and then eliminate it or force it to change

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(a) Pressure; strong U.S. representations of views; conditional

withholding of requested assistance or needed support; the threat or decision to shift U.S. support to alternative leadership. (This approach is reflected particularly in Durbrow's cables and in some State Department guidance.)

(b) No-strings assistance, the achievement of a friendly, generous, reassuring stance with respect to the regime, in hopes that this confidence would be returned and lead to cooperative gestures and concessions by the GVN. (Thus, the JCS position cited above on providing full support to the 20,000-man increase; thus, also, the later recommendations by the Taylor Group that U.S. combat units be deployed essentially to reassure and bolster the confidence of the Vietnamese; and four years later, the argument by McGeorge Bundy in February 1965 for the initiation of a sustained reprisal bombing strategy against the north, primarily to reassure the Vietnamese of the U.S. commitment and thus to enhance U.S. influence for needed change in Vietnam.)

(c) By-passing the top levels of government to exert influence through pressure, persuasion, and direct support upon lower levels of the bureaucratic and military hierarchy. (This approach was also endorsed by the Taylor Group, and was earlier reflected in the extension of the U.S. advisory system down to battalion level; it is an approach frequently favored, in theory and in practice, by CIA in its operations in Vietnam.)

(d) Personal influence at high levels, based upon personal rapport, intimate friendly associations, and sympathetic understanding and support of the whole range of the counterpart's problems. (This approach was peculiarly identified with Brig General Edward Lansdale, both conceptually and in terms of his own end predilections.)

(d) Could have worked earlier when U.S. influence on Diem was more preponderant but in 1961 it was already too late.

There was, in principle, no disagreement among participants in the U.S. decision making process in 1961, that some method -- one or another of those above, or some other -- had to be tried and to be made effective to achieve significant changes currently undesired by the GVN. The differences were over the specific aims to which the strongest influence should be addressed, and over the form of influence to be emphasized. In retrospect, fully effective means of influence were never found, or used; virtually none of the changes in the regime or in its operations regarded by one or another participants in 1961 as essential to success was ultimately achieved in the life of ^{the} Diem regime, except in some cases, in purely formal terms. The main experiments were along the lines of (b) and (c) above. Pressure tactics were downgraded with the replacement of Ambassador Durbrow, although important but abortive gestures were made in this direction at later points in 1961, and the "Lansdale approach" was never tried in the person of Lansdale himself, ^{despite Diem's requests for his services} ~~(though the~~ ^{Fred Nolting} ~~substitution of Fritz Milton for Eldridge Durbrow was intended to be a move~~ in this direction.)

What gave the Lansdale approach particular significance as a possible alternative in the context of 1961 -- aside from his notable successful experience with Diem in 1954-56, well-known to and appreciated by some of the decision-makers in 1961, including William Bundy -- was Lansdale's critical role in the policy process of 1961 by virtue of his position in the Office of Special Operations, Office of the Secretary of Defense, ^{there was also} and the fact that a long briefing by Lansdale on his trip to Vietnam from 2-14 January 1961, was one of President Kennedy's first exposures to the problems of Vietnam. Lansdale's fund of experience on Vietnam, his repu-

tation for success there (and earlier in the Philippines advising Magsaysay in the anti-Huk campaign) and his evident dedication in the field of counter-insurgency and specifically to the problems of Vietnam, gave ~~(although his anti-Communist beliefs are somewhat plausible - and plenty)~~ his testimony unusual authority and influence. ~~W~~ Lansdale stressed ~~of action - To the opposition by some to his presence in Saigon.~~ strongly the need for reassuring Diem as to U.S. attitudes toward him and support for him, but implied that this was a task that called for special understanding and personal qualities in the U.S. representative.

"President Diem and I are friends. Also, he is a man who put other Vietnamese friends of mine in jail or exiled them. It is hardly a blind friendship."

"...Ngo Dinh Diem is still the only Vietnamese with executive ability and the required determination to be an effective President. I believe there will be another attempt to get rid of him soon, unless the U.S. makes it clear that we are backing him as the elected top man. If the 11 November coup had been successful, I believe that a number of highly selfish and mediocre people would be squabbling among themselves for power while the Communists took over. The Communists will be more alert to exploit the next coup attempt. At present, most Vietnamese oppositionists believe that the U.S. would look favorably upon a successful coup."

"...We must support Ngo Dinh Diem until another strong executive can replace him legally. President Diem feels that Americans have attacked him almost as viciously as the Communists, and he has withdrawn into a shell for self-protection. We have to show him by deeds, not words alone, that we are his friend. This will make our influence effective again."

"In reflecting on our conversations, I have concluded that most folks who talk to him have little empathy for, or sensitive understanding of, him. They fail to realize that Diem is human and doesn't like the idea of people trying to kill him out of hatred; the coup attempt of 11 November opened at 3 a.m. by bursts of heavy machine gun fire into his bedroom in an obvious try at liquidating him in his bed. On top of this, he has now had nearly 7 years of venomous attack by the Communists who know that he is a major obstacle which must be destroyed before they can win. This is a daily psychological attack on him in his own country, in his own language, and listened to by his own people...."

(memo for SecDef and Deputy SecDef from BrigGen Iansdale, 17 Jan 61, Subject: Vietnam, pp. 7,2,4,8)

A reader familiar with Lansdale's background and instincts could hardly miss the neatness with which the "job requirements" listed for the Ambassadorial post fitted Lansdale's own qualifications. But, Lansdale's actual experience made this analysis more than self-seeking; and, in fact, on several occasions during 1961 President Diem specifically requested (through the Chief of the MAAG and through General Taylor) that Lansdale be sent to Vietnam to work directly with him. Beyond this, other aspects of Lansdale's report revealed the emphasis on personal qualifications and ^{on} ~~an~~ intimate working relationship with counterparts to be central to Lansdale's notions of effective U.S. influence. ^{AP} Lansdale scarcely differed, in fact, from Ambassador Durbrow or the State Department desk officers, in emphasis on need for political evolution and for measures by the government to earn popular support, although he did feel that this evolution must -- under current conditions in Vietnam -- take place under the leadership of Diem rather than with any replacement. However, both in 1960 and in 1961 (including his role as executive officer of the Gilpatrick Task Force in April) he took very sharp issue with the impersonal pressure tactics and the emphasis upon formal concessions urged by State Department and acted upon by Durbrow, which he regarded as jeopardizing Diem's stability and confidence in the U.S. and as ineffective forms of influence. (In a recent memo to Ambassador Bunker, 10 September 1967, Lansdale expressed views on U.S. bargaining tactics relevant to the negotiations that Durbrow and Nolting were conducting in 1960 and 1961:

"'Package'. Experience has shown that a unilaterally prepared 'package' proposal presented to the GVN does not result in either genuine acceptance or effective implementation of the proposal by the Vietnamese. The reasons for this are essentially

those of basic human feelings (particularly personal and national pride). We would feel the same way, in the shoes of the Vietnamese. Also, our awareness of the complexities of the actual power structure of the Vietnamese leaders is quite naturally not as profound as is such awareness among Vietnamese leaders themselves. Thus, we sometimes suggest actions which are unrealistic, given the subtleties of this structure.

"Pressure. Experience also has shown that direct pressure, or 'leverage,' to compel the GVN to act does not work well. The Vietnamese have had centuries of experience in dealing with foreigners who told them what to do. They have become masters at handling 'outsiders' in such a way as to persuade the latter that either they have taken or soon will take the desired steps, while at the same time in reality doing as they themselves wish. Direct pressure simply produces illusory 'results' or a sharp deterioration of effective communication between Vietnamese and Americans."

(Memo to Ambassador Bunker from Ed Lansdale, September 10, 1967,
Subject: Post-Election Actions)

Among the problems which Americans should address, Lansdale stressed, was precisely that of "^{de}effusing" -- by turning to constructive effort -- the urban opposition to Diem which Lansdale took as seriously as ^{ad}Durbrow or as ~~reflected in~~ the August 1960 SNIE. But his suggestions were more radical than the proposals in the 14 October demarche by Durbrow in calling for U.S. political action directly with opposition groups -- moving them from the direction of an open opposition party, ^{is} ~~in~~ this was a matter Lansdale implied, not only of creative effort ~~needed by~~ ^{for} Americans but of undoing the effects of some past American policy.

"The United States has been the main foreign political mentor for Free Vietnam since it became an independent nation. Of course other nations have had their influence. But we were the ones who have spoken with authority, who have held the purse-strings, who trained and advised the government personnel, and to whom most Vietnamese in political life have looked for guidance. It is only human to want to find someone else to blame for what has gone wrong...."

"Ambassador Durbrow seemed genuinely surprised when I told him that the Can Lao Party in Vietnam was originally promoted by the U.S. State Department and was largely the brain-child of a highly-respected, senior U.S. Foreign Service professional. Several weeks after this action was undertaken originally, I learned of it and warned that the benefits were extremely short-term and that great lasting harm could result by a favored party forcing older parties to go underground. However, the decision had been made, the Can Lao party had been started, and we had to start working from that reality. We cannot go back to living in //

*False, Vietnamese
tend to consider Americans
as well intentioned but
politically unsophisticated
and sometimes
naive.*

the past and must keep moving ahead, but that doesn't mean that we have to pay forever for our mistakes.

"However, the real point is that we don't seem to have very long memories or enough solid feeling of responsibility for our acts. Many U.S. Foreign Service officials leap into attacks on the Can Lao Party. I agree with their reasons. Any thinking American would. But I sure would feel better about it if they could only remember the consequences of their own actions for a few short years - and learn from that memory. I cannot truly sympathize with Americans who help promote a fascistic state and then get angry when it doesn't act like a democracy.

"So, what should we do about it? I have a concrete recommendation. We need an American in Saigon who can work with real skill, with great sensitivity to Vietnamese feelings, and with a fine sense of the dangerous limits of Vietnamese national security in a time of emergency. This unusual American should be given the task of creating an opposition party which would coalesce the majority of the opposition into one organization, of helping this new party adopt a platform which contains sound ideas for building national entities which the Vietnamese people would find worth defending against the Communists, and of strongly influencing it to play the role of loyal opposition while President Diem is in power and the nation is in such great danger.

"This work with the opposition is a matter of grave urgency. Unless the energies of the malcontents, the frustrated, the patriots on the outs are quickly channeled into constructive political works, they are going to explode into destructive political work. This opposition situation in Saigon-Cholon is at the bursting point, and there is no safety valve. When it next blows, and if Diem cannot cope with it, the Saigon political scene has all the makings of turning into anarchy. It can happen, and soon...."

"U.S. military men in Vietnam should be freed to work in the combat areas. Our MAAG has a far greater potential than is now being utilized. U.S. military men are hardly in a position to be listened to when they are snug in rear areas and give advice to Vietnamese officers who have attended the same U.S. military schools and who are now in a combat in which few Americans are experienced. MAAG personnel from General McGarr on down expressed desire to get more into real field work; let's give them what they want as far as U.S. permission is concerned and let them earn their way into positions of greater influence with the Vietnamese military in the field...."

(Memo for SecDef and Deputy SecDef, 17 Jan 61, from BrigGen Iansdale, Subject: Vietnam)

extra it, not only as loyal opposition but also to create a credible alternative to the existing regime of the U.S. wants a frequent measure of pressure, this is the best: to have a deterrent against misbehavior.

~~In the absence of Lansdale in Saigon, this point of view on the urgency of political institutions that would serve as a "safety valve" for oppositionist resentment~~ ^{was to} cost dearly in the urban revolts of 1963.

At the time of Lansdale's briefing of the President (25 January 1961) President Kennedy apparently indicated that he had in mind offering Lansdale an important post in Saigon, possibly the Ambassadorship (see Shaplan, p. _____), but this proposal was vetoed, apparently by the State Department. Late in November, 1961, when it was apparent that Diem was showing recalcitrance toward the political quid pro quos demanded in Kennedy's initial offer of increased assistance, William Bundy, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), suggested to the Secretary of Defense:

"Re General Lansdale, General McGarr has sent two messages by special channels reporting disappointment by Diem that no decision has been made on Ed's coming back. (From these and other indications, it is clear that McGarr himself would favor this.) In spite of the importance of Ed's current assignment, I think he belongs in Vietnam, where he is of unique value.

"The importance of both these points is underscored by Nolting's negative talks with both Diem and Thuan. We badly need something to sweeten the mixture...."

(ASD(ISA) memo for the Secretary, 25 Nov 61, Subject: Command Arrangements for Vietnam, Ref No. 1-19366/61.)

But, for what it might have been worth -- and that must remain uncertain -- the "Lansdale card" was not played.

In May of 1961, Durbrow was continuing to sparr with Diem over the

CIP:

"During inauguration reception at Palace April 29, Diem took me aside and asked if I had given green light for US implementation of our part of counter insurgency plan (CIP). I replied frankly that I had not and noted that as stated in my letter of February 13 certain minimum actions must be taken by the GVN first

* Also - some adverse DOD comment.
* In 1968 when Lans returned from his most recent VN assignment, there was a proposal to request his assignment as Director of IN-Ting Center. Again, disapproved by State & FSI.

if CIP is to produce results. I listed following actions: (1) Establishment of a central intelligence organization; (2) assignment of operational control for counter insurgency operations within military chain of command; and (3) implementation of reforms announced by Diem on February 6. Diem replied that he would do all these things, but that time was required to work out details. He said various GVN Cabinet members and Joint General Staff studying proposals and have different ideas....I replied that frankly time was slipping by and as yet there no action on these three points, which essential before I can give 'green light' on equipment for 20,000 increase in armed forces."

(Embtel Saigon 1656, Section 1 of 2, May 3, 1961), p. 1.

A comment by Durbrow on his discussion with Vice President Tho carried the important implication that it was not only desk officers in Washington, or ~~the Ambassador himself~~ ^{Americans in general}, who regarded both political reform, and, implicitly, firm pressure by the United States to achieve it, as of great urgency; as implied by Lansdale in his January memorandum, the U.S. role and power in Vietnam gave ^{to US} it political responsibilities both in fact and in eyes of Vietnamese.

"....Tho said action now by President, at least implementation of reforms, needed in order capitalize on present ⁽⁴²⁻¹¹⁻¹¹⁾ in popular feeling about situation following GVN success in carrying out elections despite VC efforts to disrupt. Stating he did not know when if ever reforms will be implemented, he commented that failure take such action after so many promises would lose all momentum gained from elections. Tho added that, aside from psychological impact, reforms likely take little change unless Diem himself changes his method of operating. He noted that if 'super ministers' without real authority they likely become just additional level in bureaucracy without making GVN more effective."

(Ibid., p. 2).

In the course of his formal farewell call, May 2, 1961, Durbrow asked Diem for the last time if decrees had yet been signed on intelligence organization, chain of command and reform.

"...Diem replied that he not feeling well (he has cold) and with inauguration he has not had time focus on this quest but he will do it...."

(Ibid., Section 2 of 2, p. 1)

had Tho carried same weight that had with Diem in the difficult years 54-56. Tho as Diem would have had a complete different style - Had Diem been appointed in 1950 - The "No handout" combination might have saved the cause.

Diem (by 2.1), said to me constitution & manner of change of new

In this last conversation a note then entered that was to grow in importance throughout 1961.

(over 2000)
 "Diem, referring Sihanouk's Vientiane press conference (Vietnam's 1979), stated he did not believe there would be 14-nation conference and he afraid Laos almost lost already. Diem argued that since PL occupy almost all of southern Laos, we must agree _____ increase in RVNAF _____ provide additional personnel to train self defense corps which in very bad shape....While we should proceed with procurement equipment for 20,000 increase as recommended my 1606, I do not believe GVN should be informed of this green light, particularly until above decree signed."

(Ibid., p. 2.)

Earlier in December 1960, Durbrow himself had referred to the deteriorating situation in Laos as a valid basis for the RVNAF force increase, though General McGarr demurred, claiming it necessary in any case; but whatever the strict military requirement posed by events in Laos it was to become increasingly clear that U.S. policy in Laos was imposing psychological costs on our relationship of confidence with Diem and other SEA leaders. In effect, U.S. bargaining power with Diem was to decline steadily sharply because of the need to reassure Diem, and others, that we need not draw ominous conclusions from the Laos Assembly on our commitment to their own defense. After Durbrow's departure, the Charge, Joseph Mendenhall, reported that as a result of acceptable GVN agreement on military aspects of the CIP as well as implementation of certain of these, he recommended that:

"....We should now inform GVN we giving 'green light' for 20,000 force increase and will proceed with deliveries MAP equipment. This recommendation made despite fact we do not know how well GVN will implement these two actions in actual practice, inadequacy GVN actions on some other important aspects on CIP and absences as yet of implementation of GVN reorganization announced by Diem February 6. We believe however need for 20,000 force increase, as accentuated by deterioration of situation in Laos, and indication shown by the most recent actions that Diem taking steps toward organizing GVN effectively, warrant 'green light' now."

(Saigon Embtel 1688, May 7, 1967), p. 3.

On the matter of tactics, Mendenhall commented:

"...Strongly recommend that Dept's reply be received in time to enable Amb Nolting to give 'green light' to GVN on 20,000 force increase in advance of Vice Pres's arrival. This very important in order sustain effectiveness of embassy in dealings with GVN and avoid leading GVN believe that it can get what it wants by going over Embassy's head to Washington."

(Ibid., p. 3)

But the interests of reassurance -- in the context of the Laos situation -- took precedence over Embassy needs for leverage, and Vice President Johnson was on his way to Saigon with a reassuring promise of full support for the force increase in his pocket.

The "Presidential Program for Vietnam" of April-May 1961.

On April 20, 1961, President Kennedy asked the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Gilpatric to:

"a. Appraise the current status and future prospects of the Communist drive to dominate South Viet-Nam.

"b. Recommend a series of actions (military, political and/or economic, overt and/or covert) which, ~~image~~ ... will prevent Communist domination of that country."

(SecDef memo for Deputy SecDef, 20 Apr 61, SD Cont No. SD-552)

The President asked for Gilpatric's report by April 27.

Gilpatric organized an Interdepartmental Task Force with representatives from State, Defense, CIA, ICA, USIA and the Office of the President, with ~~Brig~~ Brig General Edward Lansdale as operations officer. By April 26th the group had prepared a report (in extension of the Counter Insurgency Plan) which was submitted to the President on April 27th and discussed by the NSC that day. [The following discussion is not an adequate or comprehensive treatment of the workings of the Gilpatric Task Force, but a summary serving as a bridge to the later discussion of the Taylor Mission. This portion must be expanded in later drafts.]

Two days later, at an April 29 meeting of the NSC, the President approved some specific military and covert actions from the report, the military actions being:

"1. Increase of MAAG complement by approximately 100 additional personnel.

"2. Expansion of MAAG responsibility to include support and advice to the Self Defense Corps of approximately 40,000 men.

"3. Authorization of MAP support for the entire Civil Guard force of 66,000.

"4. Installation of a radar surveillance capability to enable Vietnam to obtain warning of Communist overflights conducted for intelligence or clandestine air supply purposes.

"5. Providing MAP support for the Vietnamese Junk Force to prevent Viet Cong infiltration by water. (This was not included in the Counter-Insurgency Plan.)"

{State-Department-Research-Project-630, op. cit., p. 20}--
(Ref: NSC Action 2416, April 29, 1961: summary from State Department Research Project 630, op. cit., p. 20).

The President further directed the task force, with the addition of representatives from Treasury and the Budget to prepare a ^{revision} review of the report for further consideration by the Council.

The resulting draft of 6 May 1961, entitled "A Program of Action to Prevent Communist Domination of South Vietnam," differed from the April 26th report primarily on political matters, ^{reflecting inputs} from the Department of State. Where the April 26th draft had stated the political objective: "assist the GVN under President Diem to develop within the country the widest consensus of public support for a government dedicated to resisting Communist domination," (p. 4) the new draft had in its place the objective:

"Develop political and economic conditions which will create a solid and widespread support among the key political groups and the general population for a Vietnam which has the will to resist Communist encroachment and which in turn stems from a stake in a freer and more democratic society." (p. 5)

(A marginal comment by Edward Lansdale, for the eyes of Deputy Secretary Gilpatrick, objected to the shift, observing of the new formulation:

"The elected President of Vietnam is ignored in this statement, as the base to build upon in countering the communists. This will have the U.S. pitted against Diem as first priority, the communists as second.")

This goal was elaborated on in a political annex based on new inputs from State Department: (from Annex 2, 6 May draft):

"General Objectives

"1. In order to develop the political and economic conditions for solid and widespread support of the GVN by key political groups and the general population which will enable it to continue to resist Communist encroachment, we must continue to work through and support the present Vietnamese government despite its acknowledged weaknesses. No other even remotely feasible alternative exists at this point in time which does not involve an unacceptable degree of risk. At the same time, we do not underestimate the difficulties inherent in attempting to effect a major alteration in the present governmental structure or in its objectives. To accomplish this will require very astute dealing between US government personnel and the Vietnamese. However, we believe that we have the combination

28-10 US
could have
this objective

all the
rest is in
flagrant
contradiction
with his
statement

The risk in
1957 of a
planned
transition to
a new
government
should be
borne in
mind

10-1-1961

of positive inducements plus points at which discreet pressure can be exercised which will permit accomplishment of this objective.

12-0

"US Support for Diem

"2. President Diem is not now fully confident of United States support. This confidence has been undermined partly by our vigorous efforts to get him to mend his ways politically, and partly by the equivocal attitude he is convinced we took at the time of the November 11, 1960, attempted coup. It is essential that President Diem's full confidence in and communication with the United States be restored promptly.

"3. Increasing the confidence of President Diem and his government in the United States must be the starting point of our new approach to Vietnam. Fortunately a number of circumstances are favorable; a new administration in the United States, a new ambassador going to Vietnam, and the fact that President Diem has received a new mandate. Nevertheless, the going will not be easy. Given Diem's personality and character and the abrasive nature of our recent relationships, success or failure in this regard will depend very heavily on Ambassador Nolting's ability to get on the same wave-length with Diem."

* * *

"5. The Vice President's visit will provide the added incentive needed to give the GVN the motivation and confidence it needs to carry on the struggle. We believe that meetings between the Vice President and President Diem will act as a catalytic agent to produce broad agreement on the need for accelerated joint Vietnamese-US actions to resist Communist encroachment in S.E. Asia. These meetings will also serve to get across to President Diem our confidence in him as man of great stature and as one of the strong figures in S. E. Asia on whom we are placing our reliance. [Vice President Johnson was later criticized publicly for what was regarded as fulsome praise of Diem; this and other policy papers makes it clear that the Vice President was acting under explicit guidance in his flattery.] At the same time, these conferences should impress Diem with the degree of importance we attach to certain political and economic reforms in Vietnam which are an essential element in frustrating Communist encroachments. Recognizing the difficulties we have had in the past in persuading Diem to take effective action on such reforms, as specific an understanding as possible should be solicited from Diem on this point. [The marginal comment by Lansdale on Deputy Secretary Gilpatric's copy: "Disastrous if attempted! Indicates State policy completely unchanged--same as what has hurt us so much--"] Finally it might be possible for the Vice President to return to Washington with a letter from Diem to the President replying to the letter referred to in Paragraph 4 above.

"6. Despite his recent success at the polls, President Diem lacks adequate support of a large proportion of opinion-making elements in Vietnam. He also needs more understanding and support of the mass of people. His autocratic methods and his lack of communication with the Vietnamese people are a continuing cause of concern.

"7. The chief threat to the viability of President Diem's administration is, without a doubt, the fact of Communist insurgency and the government's inability to protect its own people. Thus military measures must have the highest priority. There is, nevertheless, strong discontent with the government among not only the elite but among peasants, labor and business. Criticism focuses on the dynastic aspects of the Diem rule, on its clandestine political apparatus and on the methods through which the President exercises his leadership. This is aggravated by Communist subversive attempts to discredit the President and weaken his government's authority. All this is made the easier because of a communication void existing between the government and the people. For many months United States efforts have been directed toward persuading Diem to adopt political, social, and economic changes designed to correct this serious defect. Many of these changes are included in the Counter-Insurgency Plan. Our success has been only partial. There are those who consider that Diem will not succeed in the battle to win men's minds in Vietnam.

"Thus in giving priority emphasis to the need for internal security, we must not relax in our efforts to persuade Diem of the need for political, social and economic progress. If his efforts are inadequate in this field, our overall objective could be seriously endangered and we might once more find ourselves in the position of shoring up a leader who had lost the support of his people."

[The Vice President's memo for the President on his mission to South and Southeast Asia subsequently noted:

"The Vice President obtained Diem's agreement that parallel political and economic action had equal importance with military measures but took note of Diem's view that political and economic actions must be those appropriate to Vietnam as a country which is under-developed and subject to communist subversion."]

The May 6th draft stated the further political objective:

"Undertake military security arrangements which emphasize the U.S. intention to stand behind Vietnam's resistance to Communist aggression.

"a. Undertake a new bilateral arrangement with Vietnam, by the following action:

(1) On the grounds that the Geneva Accords have placed inhibitions upon free world action while at the same time placing no restrictions upon the Communists, Ambassador Nolting should be instructed to enter into preliminary discussions with Diem regarding the possibility of a defensive security alliance despite the inconsistency of such action with the Geneva Accords. This action would be based on the premise that such an undertaking is justified in international law as representing a refusal to be bound by the Accords in a degree and manner beyond that which the other party to the Accords has shown a willingness to honor. Communist violations, therefore, justify the establishment of the security arrangement herein recommended. Concurrently, Defense should study the military advisability of committing U.S. forces in Vietnam (as noted in Military section above)."

(pp. 11 & 12), 6 May draft

"In preparation for possible commitment of U.S. forces to Vietnam, which might result from an NSC decision following discussions between Vice President Johnson and President Diem, Defense is undertaking an immediate study of the size and composition of U.S. forces required to:

"- provide maximum psychological impact in deterrence of further Communist aggression from North Vietnam, China, or the Soviet Union, while rallying the morale of the Vietnamese and encouraging the support of SEATO and neutral nations for Vietnam's defense;

"- release Vietnamese forces from advanced and static defense positions to permit their fuller commitment to counter-insurgency actions;

"- provide maximum training to approved Vietnamese forces; and

"- provide significant military resistance to potential North Vietnam Communist and/or Chinese Communist action."

(p. 6), 6 May draft

The President reviewed the draft report on May 11 and made the following decisions:

"1. The U.S. objective and concept of operations stated in report are approved: to prevent Communist domination of South Vietnam; to create in that country a viable and increasingly democratic society, and to initiate, on an accelerated basis, a series of mutually supporting actions of a military, political, economic, psychological and covert character designed to achieve this objective.

"2. The approval given for specific military actions by the President at the National Security Council meeting on April 29, 1961, is confirmed.

"3. Additional actions listed at pages 4 and 5 of the Task Force Report are authorized, with the objective of meeting the increased security threat resulting from the new situation along the frontier between Laos and Vietnam. In particular, the President directs an assessment of the military utility of a further increase in G.V.N. forces from 170,000 to 200,000, together with an assessment of the parallel political and fiscal implications.

"4. The President directs full examination by the Defense Department, under the guidance of the Director of the continuing Task Force on Vietnam, of the size and composition of forces which would be desirable in the case of a possible commitment of U.S. forces to Vietnam. The diplomatic setting within which this action might be taken should also be examined.

"5. The U.S. will seek to increase the ~~and~~ confidence of President Diem and his government in the United States by a series of actions and messages relating to the trip of Vice President Johnson. The U.S. will attempt to strengthen President Diem's popular support within Vietnam by reappraisal and negotiation, under the direction of Ambassador Nolting. Ambassador Nolting is also requested to recommend any necessary reorganization of the Country Team for these purposes.

"6. The U.S. will negotiate in appropriate ways to improve Vietnam's relationship with other countries, especially Cambodia, and its standing in world opinion.

"7. The Ambassador is authorized to begin negotiations looking toward a new bilateral arrangement with Vietnam, but no firm commitment will be made to such an arrangement without further review by the President.

"8. The U.S. will undertake economic programs in Vietnam with a view to both short term immediate impact and a contribution to the longer range economic viability of the country, and the specific actions proposed on pages 12 and 13 of the Task Force Report are authorized.

"9. The U.S. will strengthen its efforts in the psychological field as recommended on pages 14 and 15 of the Task Force Report.

"10. The program for covert actions outlined on page 15 of the Task Force Report is approved.

"11. These decisions will be supported by appropriate budgetary action, but the President reserves judgment on the levels of funding proposed on pages 15 and 16 of the Task Force Report and in the funding annex.

"12. Finally, the President approves the continuation of a ~~special~~ special Task Force on Vietnam, established in and directed by the Department of State under Sterling J. Cottrell as Director, and Chalmers B. Wood as Executive Officer."

(NSAM 52, May 11, 1961, cited in State Department Research Proj 630, pp. 23, 24, 25.)

These decisions were communicated to the field on May 13. On May 19 the NSC noted that these Presidential decisions "required no revision" and the next day the "President's Program for Vietnam" ~~listing~~ listing only those actions which had been approved by the President -- most of which were extracted from the Gilpatric task force draft of May 6 -- was sent to Saigon with instructions that the program was "to be carried out on priority action basis with high sense urgency and dedication."

Two items on the President's program that were to come up for urgent consideration in October as a result of GVN initiative -- a new US-GVN bilateral arrangement, and possible commitment of U.S. forces to Vietnam -- were postponed in May in response to GVN reserve. With respect to a new bilateral treaty, Nolting reported:

"....that the Saigon Task Force considered that such an arrangement was 'neither necessary nor desirable at present time' as an indication of United States support, and that the Vietnamese Government had not expressed an interest in such a new arrangement. The Ambassador also pointed out that such a bilateral arrangement would represent a ~~222~~ direct violation of Article 19 of the Geneva Accords."

(From Saigon 1800, May 26, 1961, cited in State Research Project 630, p. 26).

Meanwhile, in a discussion between Secretary Rusk, Deputy Secretary Gilpatric and others in the State Department on May 5, Rusk had concluded "we should not ~~put~~ place combat forces in South Vietnam at this time," but that we should proceed to augment the MAAG with up to 100 additional military personnel ; and it was agreed that the deployment of additional US forces should receive further study and consideration.

(MEMO FOR MR. 5 May 61, Subj: 5 May 61 Meeting at State)

Accordingly, on 8 May 1961, Deputy Secretary Gilpatric requested of the JCS:

"In preparation for the possible commitment of U.S. forces to Vietnam, it is desired that you give further review and study of the military advisability of such an action, as well as to the size and composition of such U.S. forces...."

(Memo for Chairman, JCS from Dep SecDef, 8 May 61, Subj: U.S. Forces for South Vietnam, SecDef Cont No. TS-458).

For the missions of such U.S. forces and preliminary concepts of size and composition, Gilpatric referred to the May 6th draft of the ~~2222~~ Gilpatric report.

The JCS responded on 10 May 1961 ~~for~~ (JCSM 320-61)

"1. In considering the possible commitment of US forces to South Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have reviewed the over-all critical situation in Southeast Asia with particular emphasis upon the present highly flammable situation in South Vietnam. In this connection the question, however, of South Vietnam should not be considered in isolation but rather in conjunction with Thailand and their over-all relationship to the security of Southeast Asia. The views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the question regarding the deployment of US forces into Thailand were provided to you by JCSM-311-61, dated 9 May 1961. The current potentially dangerous military and political situation in Laos, of course, is the focal point in this area. Assuming that the political decision is to hold Southeast Asia outside the Communist sphere, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that US forces should be deployed immediately to South Vietnam; such action should be taken primarily to prevent the Vietnamese from being subjected to the same situation as presently exists in Laos, which would then require deployment of US forces into an already existing combat situation.

"2. In view of the foregoing, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that the decision be made now to deploy suitable US forces to South Vietnam. Sufficient forces should be deployed to accomplish the following purposes:

"a. Provide a visible deterrent to potential North Vietnam and/or Chinese Communist action;

"b. Release Vietnamese forces from advanced and static defense positions to permit their fuller commitment to counter-insurgency actions;

"c. Assist in training the Vietnamese forces to the maximum extent possible consistent with their mission;

"d. Provide a nucleus for the support of any additional US or SEATO military operation in Southeast Asia; and

"e. Indicate the firmness of our intent to all Asian nations.

"3. In order to maintain US flexibility in the Pacific, it is envisioned that some or all of the forces deployed to South Vietnam would come from the United States. The movement of these troops could be accomplished in an administrative manner and thus not tax the limited lift ~~and~~ capabilities of CINCPAC.

"4. In order to accomplish the foregoing, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that:

"a. President Diem be encouraged to request that the United States fulfill its SEATO obligation; in view of the new threat now posed by the Laotian situation, by the immediate deployment of appropriate US forces to South Vietnam;

"b. Upon receipt of this request, suitable forces could be immediately deployed to South Vietnam in order to accomplish the above-mentioned purposes. Details of size and composition of these forces must include the views of both CINCPAC and CHMAAG which are not yet available."

(Memo for SecDef, 10 May 1961, JCSM-320-61, Subj: US Forces in South Vietnam (C), /s/ Arleigh Burke, CNO, For the JCS.)

The President's decisions of May 11 called for further examination of the size and composition of forces desirable in the case of a possible commitment of U.S. forces to Vietnam. However, by May 12, Vice President Johnson raised this subject with Diem in Saigon, at which time Diem stated that he would not want such combat troops, except in the case of "overt aggression." Diem explained that the introduction of U.S. or other foreign combat troops into the country would contravene and signify the end of the Geneva Accords. Diem indicated that as many military personnel as needed could be brought in for training and advising the Vietnamese forces.

By reference (From Saigon 1743, May 15, 1961, (cited in State Department Research Project 630, op. cit. p. 26) ^P there was some ambiguity as to whether Diem would accept U.S. combat units for ~~ex~~ direct training purposes resolved by a report from Nolting on May 27 that Diem had concluded that the introduction of U.S. combat units in this or any other role "would not be desirable at the present time." (From Saigon 1803, May 27, 1961, Cited in State Res Proj, p. 27).

Following the visit of Vice President Johnson, President Diem wrote to President Kennedy:

"....In the course of our frank and fruitful conversations, Vice-President Johnson graciously asked for my own suggestions as to the most urgent needs as we see them to save our country from the vicious communist aggression being waged against us, both within our borders and from every side today. I was most deeply gratified by this gracious gesture by your distinguished Vice-President, particularly as we have not become accustomed to being asked for our own views as to our needs. The recent developments in Laos have emphasized our grave concern for the security of our country with its long and vulnerable frontiers.

"With the very real possibility that we may find ourselves faced with communist military forces pressing our borders not only from the north of the 17th parallel but from a possibly communist dominated Laos and a communist or neutral Cambodia on the west as well, we have undertaken urgent plans to determine the needs to save our country. These studies will be completed in preliminary form in about a week.

"We now know that as a small nation we cannot hope to meet all of our defense needs alone and from our own resources. We are prepared to make the sacrifices in blood and manpower to save our country and I know that we can count on the material support from your great country which will be so essential to achieving final victory...."

(Ltr to President Kennedy from from Ngo Dinh Diem, 15 May 61).

Diem's mention of "material support" from the U.S. was in accord with his long held attitude that it was essential to preserve nationalist image in competition with the communists, by avoiding too-overt reliance upon the United States, and in part upon American troops; he had specifically rejected the notion of combat troops when this had been raised on the Johnson visit on ^{May 12} ~~June 9~~. In a second letter listing more detailed needs, he again drew attention to events in Laos, as the basis for requiring a greatly increased force level of Vietnamese troops. He began (as summarized in a State Department telegram):

"Events in Laos, equivocal attitude of Cambodia and communist intensification aggressive actions have created perilous situation.

Military situation is currently to advantage of communists. 2860 armed communist agents have infiltrated into SVN during last four months. Additional SVN forces totaling 270 thousand men required to counter communist threat. Must augment VN Army by nine infantry divisions with modest naval and air force increases.

"(2) To provide minimum initial resistance to communist infiltration through Southern Laos we require 2 new divisions for the First and Second Army Corps respectively. If these troops are not made available we must withdraw our forces southward from the 17th parallel and sacrifice greater areas of our country to the communists. These two new divisions must be mobilized and equipped immediately after completion of the 20 thousand man activation which you have offered to support."

The strategic concept of this force would be to overcome communist insurgency and provide initial resistance to overt external aggression until SEATO can come to our aid. This military posture must be maintained for a long period and we will continue to need your support as these military requirements exceed the capacity of our economy. To accomplish this expansion we must intensify our training programs to produce qualified combat leaders and technical specialists thus expanding the MAAG by increments of American military personnel who will establish training centers for VN Armed Forces. This will express U.S. determination to halt communist aggression and help VN prepare itself in the fastest time. GVN cannot pay, equip, train and maintain such forces though it can bear heavy manpower burden. We need assurance this material support will be provided."

(Deptel 1538 to Amemb Saigon 15 Jun 61)

*note: 2860 agents
infiltrated
2000 agents
infiltrated*

On 3 August 1961, the JCS advised the Secretary of Defense they did not believe that an ultimate force of 270,000 -- as proposed by President Diem in his letter to President Kennedy -- "would be required to enable the RVNAF to conduct counterinsurgency operations and concurrently be prepared to meet overt aggression. The JCS are of the opinion that for the foreseeable future, the force objectives for Vietnam of a none-division equivalent force (200,000) is adequate."

(Ref: JCSM-518-61, 3 August 1961.)

An assessment of the political characteristics of the Diem regime in a NIE of 15 August 1961 (NIE 14.3/53-61: Prospects for North and South Vietnam) ^{deserves closer attention,} coming as it did on the eve of Presidential decisions that were to lead to a much closer marriage of the US and Vietnamese governments.

"Situation and Problems. Despite its many remarkable achievements, South Vietnam's national leadership never has generated much active public support. During the past year and a half, President Diem and his government have been more seriously criticized and challenged, particularly by members of the bureaucracy and the military establishment, than at any time since he consolidated his authority in 1955-1956. The criticism and dissatisfaction stem principally from serious concern with the internal security situation and from Diem's system of family rule. Despite his continuing personal prestige and reputation for integrity and courage, Diem remains an aloof and uninspiring figure to the Vietnamese. Communist propaganda intensifies public dissatisfaction with the Diem government, particularly among the peasants and urban laboring groups.

"Within the framework of a democratic constitution, Diem and a small circle of relatives and confidants exercise supreme national power. Most members of the executive branch are personal agents of Diem, fearful of assuming responsibility or of taking initiative. The legislative powers of the National Assembly are strictly circumscribed. The press and radio are largely controlled by the government, and opposition groups and critics of the government have little opportunity to make their views widely known. This highly centralized regime has provided resolute and stable leadership, but it has alienated many politically conscious South Vietnamese and inhibited the growth of strong governmental and political institutions which could provide stability and direction if Diem were to leave the scene.

"A number of officials including Vice President Nguyen Ngoc Tho, and some important members of the cabinet, the bureaucracy, and the military have questioned seriously Diem's ability to lead the government and rally the people against the Communists during what they regard as the most critical period since the end of the Indochina War. These officials also criticize Diem's failure to delegate responsibility and his reliance largely on members of his family, particularly his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu, for advice in the conduct of government affairs. Moreover, the fact that the Can Lao, a semicovert political apparatus, has been used by Diem and his brothers, Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can, not only to insure the implementation of policy but also to police the attitudes and loyalty of the governmental apparatus has created considerable antagonism within the military hierarchy and the civil service.

"The Diem regime was given a reprieve by the national elections of April 1961, in which Diem and Vice President Tho received nearly 90 percent of the total vote. Voter turnout was high, despite Communist efforts to intimidate the voters. However, the election cannot be considered an accurate manifestation of support for Diem or his regime. Diem and Tho enjoyed overwhelming advantages in the campaign, there almost certainly was some meddling with the returns, and the opposition candidates were political nonentities.

"Since the April elections, Diem has indicated an intent to rectify some of the causes of dissatisfaction. He has reorganized his cabinet in an effort to improve effectiveness and coordination. He has instructed his ministers to spend more time in the countryside, seeing that programs are followed through and seeking to win over the population. He has begun a consolidation of his intelligence services and has made a number of moves designed to provide the military greater freedom of action. He has experimented with relaxing control of the press and opposition groups. However, most of these moves have been initiated only because of urging from the US. Diem almost certainly has not changed his view that his kind of paternalistic authoritarianism is best for South Vietnam, particularly while the country is at war.

"Diem has little respect for his domestic political opponents, whom he tends to view as dupes, Communists, or agents of the French. The opposition is, in fact, largely a disparate assortment of disgruntled intellectuals, businessmen, and unsuccessful politicians, who have for one reason or another fallen out with the government. None of them has a national following of consequence, and few have any constructive ideas to offer. Although they are a source of annoyance to Diem and at times a disruptive factor in Saigon, they are not by themselves a significant present threat to the government.

"The continued existence of restiveness and dissatisfaction among military officers and other government officials is much more serious. Diem has long recognized that the greatest threat to his government--aside from the Viet Cong--lies in the possibility of a military coup. The abortive coup effort by paratroop units in November 1960, which came very near succeeding, increased Diem's suspicions of the military. As yet no new coup group appears to have taken shape.

"Political Prospects. The army will continue to be a major factor in future political developments in South Vietnam. We believe that the chances of a military coup have been reduced by recent manifestations of US support of the Diem government and by the substantial increase in US aid to help South Vietnam meet its internal security problems. Although there has been a decrease in indications of coup-plotting within the military in recent months, certain basic dissatisfactions with the national leadership persist.

*The Vietnamese
view is the
contrary.
The reshuffle of
April 1961
seemed a weakening
of the Diem regime
not a strengthening.*

If the fight against the Viet Cong goes poorly during the next year or the South Vietnamese Army suffers heavy casualties, the chances of a military coup would substantially increase."

* * *

"Thus, the outlook in South Vietnam is for a prolonged and difficult struggle with the Viet Cong insurgents. At the same time that the government is prosecuting the military campaign in the war against the Communists, it will have to act to prevent internal weaknesses and strains from causing its collapse. If Laos becomes dominated by the Communists or by a leftist regime, the GVN struggle against the Viet Cong will take on new, more perilous dimensions. If there is a serious disruption of GVN leadership as a result of Diem's death or as the result of a military coup, any momentum the GVN's counterinsurgency efforts had achieved will be halted or reversed, at least for a time. The confusion and suspicion attending a coup effort could provide the Communists an opportunity to seize control of the government."

The analysis went on to

requirements

A suggested that the problems of dealing with non-Communist

opposition on the one hand, and the Communist insurgents on the other,

were in conflict, posing

A posed a dilemma for the GVN. And in some contrast to the SNIE of one

year earlier, and to cables between State and the Embassy on the

necessity for political reform, *this NIE* the SNIE suggested that the only

feasible -- and perhaps *an* adequate -- resolution of the conflict lay in

military measures aimed at successes against the rural insurgency,

rather than in political "reforms" (which were unattainable under Diem).

"In more general terms, the chief problem confronting the GVN is how to resolve the conflicting needs of highly centralized government control for effective antiguerrilla measures on the one hand and of liberalized, more democratic political attitudes for greater public support of the government on the other. It is unlikely that Diem will undertake real political reforms in an effort to meet the complaints of the non-Communist opposition groups in Saigon, the peasants, and the military and civilian officials. In any case, Diem probably could not make enough political changes to satisfy the demands for reform by the opposition groups among the urban intellectuals. The degree of dissatisfaction among the peasants and the military and civilian officials is related directly to the success or failure of GVN efforts against Viet Cong guerrilla and subversive activity.

Improvements in the internal security situation would do more, at least in the short run, toward reducing discontent among the peasants, the military, and the civil servants than political reforms at the national level."

Already see. Already commented on that point.

~~"In more general terms....."~~

"The fact that the US is the GVN's only source of significant support and assistance is the controlling factor in the GVN's relations and attitudes toward the U.S. Diem will almost certainly continue to press for increased aid, further expansion of the armed forces, and a clear priority of military over political and economic efforts to undercut the Viet Cong. Diem will be adamant in his views as to how the GVN campaign against the Viet Cong should be waged. He will tend to regard US differences with his views or criticism of his inner circle as indications of weakening US confidence in him.

"Diem probably still has some lingering suspicion of the extent of US confidence in and support of his leadership, resulting from the paratrooper coup effort of November 1960 and urgent US representations made during that year for liberal political reforms. In the event of another coup effort against Diem's government, he would probably expect quick and strong manifestations of US support and would feel that he did not have US confidence if such manifestations were not ~~for~~ forthcoming.

"There is considerable anxiety within the GVN concerning the general US posture with respect to communism in the Far East. Diem probably regards US policy toward Laos as an indicator of US resolution in standing against Communist advances in Asia, and US policy during the ~~ix~~ past year has almost certainly raised doubts in his mind. Other indicators probably would be Diem's interpretation of US policy toward Nationalist China and toward the issue of Chinese Communist representation in the UN. Diem has no alternative to US support and assistance. Nevertheless, if he concludes that the US is weakening its anti-Communist posture in the Far East, ~~th~~ he will almost certainly make strong protests to the US and become increasingly assertive and stubborn in his relations with the U.S.

"International Attitudes. In providing the GVN a maximum of ~~encouragement~~ encouragement and extensive support in its struggle against the Communists, the US will inevitably become identified with the GVN's success or failure. The US will be under heavy pressure from other members of the non-Communist world, many of whom view the Vietnam struggle in differing terms. For example, the neighboring countries, such as Thailand, Cambodia, Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Nationalist China, have all to some extent viewed developments in Laos as a gauge of US willingness and ability to help an anti-Communist Asian government stand against a Communist 'national liberation' campaign. They will almost certainly look upon the struggle for Vietnam as a critical test of such US willingness and ability. All of them, including the neutrals, would probably suffer demoralization and loss of confidence in their prospects for maintaining their independence if the Communists were to gain control of South Vietnam. This loss of confidence might even extend to India.

"Among the Western allies, the UK and France are especially concerned by the Vietnam problem. Both governments have had serious reservations over aspects of US policy throughout the crisis in Laos and almost certainly

tend to view the developing situation in Vietnam in terms of another potential Laos. The French with their memories of the Indochina War and the British with their experience in Malaya tend to be pessimistic regarding GVN prospects for coping with the Viet Cong threat.

The reluctance of the Diem Regime to request new forms of U.S. commitment to South Vietnam, expressed by President Diem to Vice President Johnson in May, was reiterated as late as July by Vice President Tho, but in terms that foreshadowed a later shift. In a conversation with Colonel Edward Black, of DOD/ISA, who had commented that Vietnam had achieved tremendous progress since his last visit in 1956, Tho left "the impression that he held a more pessimistic view of the situation.

Where in 1961
in July 1961
was his own
view of the
state of the
affairs

"Tho then said he wished to speak frankly concerning the underlying concern throughout VN, at all levels, that if the GVN were invaded by communist forces, the US might not repeat not respond. In this regard, he cited the developments in Laos, which he said were uppermost in the minds of people throughout SE Asia, and which had added fuel to these fears. He noted that if the communists did attack it would probably be in conjunction with a well-planned, general Viet Cong uprising throughout South Vietnam. He indicated there were two ways in which the US might provide tangible reassurances, but that both of these presented political obstacles. The first was the stationing of token US combat units in the country. This was impracticable at this time as it left the GVN open to the highly-exploitable communist charge that the government was merely substituting the US for France as a colonial, occupying power. The second was a mutual defense treaty with the US. This also appeared to be impractical since it would constitute an open repudiation of the Geneva Agreements of 1954."

(Memo for Deputy Secretary Gilpatric from Brig General Lansdale, 12 July 1961, forwarding memo of conversation with Vice President Tho on 10 July, by Colonel Black)

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(Depel 1538 to Amemb Saigon 15 Jun 61)

Discussion of Staley Report and NSAM 65, 11 August 1961
to follow here.

But over the summer, as the Laos negotiations dragged on inconclusively and the Pathet Lao showed signs of nibbling away major portions of Laos without provoking a U.S. response, while infiltration into SVN and the level of Viet Cong incidents rose, Diem abruptly changed his attitude on the nature of support and commitment he needed from the U.S. On 1 October 1961, Nolting reported:

"In course long discussion with Admiral Felt and party, General McGarr, and me yesterday evening, President Diem pointed the question. He asked for a bilateral defense treaty with the US. This rather large and unexpected request seemed to have been dragged in by the heels at the end of a far-ranging discussion, but we discovered upon questioning that it was seriously intended and was put forward as result of Diem's deep fear of outcome of Laotian situation, SVN's vulnerability to increased infiltration, and his feelings that US action under SEATO Treaty vis-a-vis SVN would be inhibited by attitudes of other SEATO allies, especially UK and France, as in case Laos....."

"Our own preliminary reaction is that this request should be seriously and carefully treated to prevent any feeling on GVN's part that US not serious in its intention to support SVN; but we see major issues involved, including overriding Article 19 Geneva Accords, possible ratification problems, as well as effect on SEATO.

"Diem's frame of mind which led to this request derives evidently from his feeling that policy we are pursuing in Laos will expose his flank to communist infiltration to such an extent that large-scale hostilities in SVN are predictable. He is thus seeking a more binding US commitment than he now thinks he has through SEATO...."

(Embtel Saigon 421 to SecState, October 1, 1961)

On 10 October, Nolting elaborated upon the previously reported interview with Diem:

"....Diem referred to conversation with Harriman in which he told Harriman that a Souvanna Phouma Government in Laos would be a military disaster. Concerned over VC infiltration from Laos and supply lines from there...."

"Felt asked which was greater problem, Laos or Cambodia. Diem said little distinction, from Laos easier but Cambodia closer to Saigon. In reply to Nolting question, infiltration up sharply past two months.

"....Felt asked Diem what he could do to help, wanted to, could, had been instructed by President. Only question how much SVN could afford and use gainfully. Diem said first personnel: large increase in advisors of all types. Mentioned plans to approach increase-in-advisors-of-all-types.--Mentioned-plans to approach- Formosa for pilots and troops. Mentioned naturalization law for Chinese, cited VN Chinese in Ca Mau area fighting against VC, mentioned Father Hoa.

"Diem referred to Laos, asked Felt what were U.S. commitments in his area in event situation in SVN worsened. Felt replied from military viewpoint prepared for a limited or large scale war, but question of commitments was political. Diem asked about military plans. Felt said in event of war, prepared to support SVN with troops, planned base aviation, 7th Fleet, the works. Nolting added from political viewpoint wished to remind Vietnam of VP Johnson conversations, President takes SEATO obligations seriously and Felt's plans are in confidence with U.S. intentions if open attack.

"Nolting reminded Diem that Diem often assured him that with continued U.S. help he could contain the guerrilla warfare and subversion in SVN. Diem said had been true but situation taking on different aspects in view of increased infiltration and from the political viewpoint.

"Diem asked for bilateral treaty of defense, expression of U.S. commitment to SVN. Nolting assured Diem could count on accelerated assistance for military build-up. What was needed was synchronization of requirements, ability to absorb aid. Mentioned JFK's statement to UN furthering world opinion and support. On treaty, Nolting suggested Diem and Nolting meet to further discuss from all angles including SEATO (could be interpreted as casting doubt on SEATO). But U.S. would give careful and serious consideration."

(above summary based on notes; cable to follow: Saigon to State 158, October 10, 1961).

In an address before the United Nations General Assembly, September 25, 1961, President Kennedy had expressed his deepest concern over the situation in SEA, particularly the large scale attacks against the people of Vietnam and the use of Laotian treaty to infiltrate Vietnam. (Department of State Bulletin, October 16, 1961, p. 623 (?)).

In a memo for the Secretary of Defense (undated, but evidently from October 1961, SecDef Control # SD 1817) noted early in October that there was

not yet in Laos "anything approaching an understanding between the parties on the vital question of demobilization of the various armed forces," but that "...while the enemy has capability of initiating offensive action any time of his own choosing, he does not yet show any clear signs of doing so and cease-fire generally remains in effect although there is some increase in small probing actions on both sides.... There probably have been some Viet Minh withdrawals from northern Laos but Viet Minh movement into Southern Laos bordering on South Viet-Nam has increased. Thus it appears enemy may be accepting stalemate for time being within Laos and giving priority to stepping up offensive action against South Vietnam."

With respect to South Vietnam:

"1. Although GVN military capabilities have increased, Viet Cong capabilities are increasing at more rapid rate and Viet Cong attacks have increased in size.

"2. Viet Cong 'regular' forces have increased from about 7,000 at beginning of year to approximately 17,000.

"3. Viet Cong have moved from stage of small hands to large units. During September Viet Cong mounted three attacks with over 1,000 men in each. Viet Cong strategy may be directed at 'liberating' an area in which a 'government' could be installed.

"4. Although vast majority of Viet Cong troops are of local origin, the infiltration of Viet Cong cadres from North Viet-Nam via Laos, the demilitarized zone, and by sea appears to be increasing. However, there is little evidence of major supplies from outside sources, most arms apparently being captured or stolen from GVN forces or from the French during the Indo-China war."

It further noted that Thailand, like Diem in South Vietnam:

"...has indicated increased dissatisfaction with SEATO, desire have a bilateral defense pact with the United States, and concern that the Souvanna Phouma Government in Laos will eventually result in the loss of Laos to the Communists. The internal situation in Thailand remains stable."

"If there is a breakdown in the negotiations in Laos and renewal of Communist offensive action there, this could be met in Laos only by SEATO Plan 5 Plus. However, it would take some considerable time before that plan alone could offer material protection to the borders of South Viet-Nam. Therefore, in this eventuality, the implementation of both SEATO Plan 5 Plus and this plan with respect to South Viet-Nam should be considered.

"While a satisfactory political settlement in Laos would considerably reduce Viet Minh infiltration through Laos into South Viet-Nam, it would not entirely eliminate it. While such a reduction would materially assist the GVN in meeting the Viet Cong threat, there is no assurance that, even under these circumstances, the GVN will in the foreseeable future be able to defeat the Viet Cong. Under these circumstances, although the need of South Viet-Nam for outside assistance such as proposed in this plan would probably still be very strong, it would be much more difficult to find a satisfactory political base upon which to implement this plan."

~~"The viability of this plan would be dependent upon the degree to which it could and would also result in the GVN accelerating political and military action in its own defense. A judgment on this can only be reached after thorough exploration on the spot with the country team and the GVN."~~

(This last paragraph suggests that the proposed combat forces were addressed to an ultimate, rather than an immediate military threat; the timing was to take advantage of a political opportunity afforded by the excuse of sizeable infiltration through Laos, this providing the ingredient of external aggression.)

"The viability of this plan would be dependent upon the degree to which it could and would also result in the GVN accelerating political and military action in its own defense. A judgment on this can only be reached after thorough exploration on the spot with the country team and the GVN."

* * *

"Political Objective

To respond to an appeal by Diem to help protect his borders from the infiltration of DRV guerrillas and equipment, thus meeting the external aggression to which he is now subjected.

"Military Objective

To secure so far as possible the key border area from somewhat

south of the 17th parallel to and somewhat beyond the Laos-Cambodian border, to engage the Viet Cong in this area, and to free Vietnamese forces to fight elsewhere. In the process, to lend maximum help in communications and new techniques.

"...Forces would be 11,000 combat ground forces, small air forces, naval forces to assist in sea patrol, and supporting forces, for a total of 22,800 in Vietnam. These forces would enter at Nha Trang, the entry point already envisaged in CINCPAC planning for unilateral U.S. action in Vietnam if required, and would have the principal base at Pleiku, on the Kontum Plateau. The force would be as versatile as possible, capable of operating in small units, using helicopters, etc.

"The rules of engagement would give the Commander considerable latitude to engage in combat with Viet Cong groups encountered in any reasonable proximity to the border or threatening the SEATO forces. In addition it is of great military importance that the SEATO forces be free to engage in hot pursuit, reconnaissance, and attacks on concentrations across the border into Laos, and this might become true of Cambodia as well."

"...This initial action cannot be taken without accepting as our real and ultimate objective the defeat of the Viet Cong, and making Vietnam secure in the hands of an anti-Communist government. Thus, supplemental military action must be envisaged at the earliest stage this is politically feasible. The ultimate force requirements cannot be estimated with any precision. JCS are now considering. Three divisions would be a guess, but much would depend on effective equipment, imaginative leadership, and above all on whether the effort leads to much more and better fighting by Diem's forces. They alone can win in the end."

* * *

"Pros and Cons..."

Cons

1. The plan would not in itself solve the underlying problem of ridding SVN of communist guerrillas.
2. It would not seal off the borders of SVN except for the limited area of operations.
3. It breaks the Geneva Accords and puts responsibility on the U.S. for rationalizing the action before the U.N. and the world.
4. It raises questions of U.S. troop relationships with the Vietnamese peasants, montagnards, GVN and its army.

5. The use of SEATO forces in SVN distorts Plan Five although these forces are not a net subtraction.

6. The risk of being regarded as interlopers a la the French must be considered.

7. Communist change of tactics back to small-scale operations might leave this force in a stagnant position.

Pros

1. The effect on GVN morale of SEATO engagement in their struggle could be most heartening.

2. It could prevent the Viet Cong move to the next stage of battalion-size, formal organization to challenge the ARVN.

3. The relatively sophisticated SEATO arms, air power, communications and intelligence might spark a real transformation in ARVN tactics and action.

4. Capitalizing on U.S. intelligence sources now unavailable to the GVN could lead to effective attacks on Viet Cong nerve centers of command and communications.

5. The SEATO force commitment could be used to get from Diem a package of actions McGarr feels are needed to step up the GVN effort.

6. Introducing SEATO forces would give us for the first time some bargaining position with the Russians for a settlement in Vietnam.

7. If we go into South Vietnam now with SEATO, the costs would be much less than if we wait and go in later, or lose SVN."

"....The overall concept would first have to be discussed with Diem, both to obtain his concurrence with the concept and his assistance in development of the plan."

In the context of Diem's request for a bilateral treaty, and staff pressures for U.S. moves to counteract the affects of our Laos policy in SEA, the Deputy SecDef recorded, in a memo for record on October 11, 1961:

"At this morning's meeting with the President the following course of action was agreed upon with relation to South Vietnam:

"1. The Defense Department is authorized to send the Air Force's Jungle Jim Squadron into Vietnam to serve under the MAAG as a training mission and not for combat at the present time.

"2. General Maxwell Taylor accompanied by Dr. Rostow from the White House, General Lansdale, a representative of JCS, Mr. Cottrell from State and probably someone from ISA will leave for Vietnam over the weekend on a Presidential mission (to be announced by the President at this afternoon's press conference as an economic survey) to look into the feasibility from both political and military standpoints of the following:

"(a) the plan for military intervention discussed at this morning's meeting on the basis of the Vietnam task force paper entitled 'Concept for Intervention in Vietnam';

"(b) an alternative plan for stationing in Vietnam fewer U.S. combat forces than those called for under the plan referred to in (a) above and with a more limited objective than dealing with the Viet Cong; in other words, such a small force would probably go in at Tourane and possibly another southern port principally for the purpose of establishing a U.S. 'presence' in Vietnam.

"(c) other alternatives in lieu of putting any U.S. combat forces in Vietnam, i.e. stepping up U.S. assistance and training of Vietnam units, furnishing of more U.S. equipment, particularly helicopters and other light aircraft, trucks and other ground transport, etc.

"3. During the two or three weeks that will be required for the completion of General Taylor's mission, State will push ahead with the following political actions:

(a) protest to the ICC on the step-up in North Vietnamese support of Viet Cong activities,

(b) tabling at the UN a white paper based on Mr. William Jordan's report concerning Communist violations of the Geneva Accords, and

(c) consultation with our SEATO allies, principally the British and Australians, regarding SEATO actions in support of the deteriorating situation in Vietnam."

At a news conference that afternoon, the President announced that he was sending General Taylor to Saigon to discuss with President Diem and U.S. officials "ways in which we can perhaps better assist the Government of Vietnam in meeting this threat to its independence." The concept for intervention in South Vietnam had been premised upon an appeal by Diem for combat forces, an appeal which not only had not yet been forthcoming but which had been specifically eschewed by Diem on all

past occasions. But, with remarkable timing, two days after the President's announcement of Taylor's forthcoming visit, Ambassador Nolting was met with a request from Diem closely in line with Taylor's secret mission. Thuan requested a meeting with Nolting on October 13, during which he made, on behalf of the GVN

"...following major requests:

- (1) An additional squadron of AD-6 fighter bombers (in lieu of programmed T-28's) and delivery as soon as possible.
- (2) The sending of US civilian contract pilots for helicopters and transport planes (C-47's), for 'non-combat' operations.
- (3) US combat unit or units to be introduced into SVN as 'combat-trainer units'. Proposed use would be to station a part of this force in northern part of SVN near 17th parallel to free ARVN forces presently there for anti-guerrilla combat in high plateau. Thuan also suggested possibility stationing some US forces in several provincial seats in highlands of central Vietnam.
- (4) US reaction to proposal to request Govt Nationalist China to send one division of combat troops for operations in southwest provinces."

(Saigon Embtel 488, to SecState, 13 October 1961, Section 1 of 2.)

While Taylor was in transit to Vietnam via CINCPAC, Nolting elaborated on the Vietnamese reasons for what amounted to a radical departure in their attitude toward the insurgency and the desired U.S. role.

"In recent requests for additional US commitments to SVN Diem's Govt is acting in light of present security conditions in SVN and their estimate of increasing pressures in future there is no evidence of panic, and fact is that Diem and his Govt, if they do not win out, are so committed that they will have to go down fighting or be ousted by coup d'etat. Recent requests for additional US help have come as result calculations to bolster GVN against following: evidence of increased communist determination and accelerated organization in SVN, the Laotian situation as seen by GVN at present and potential infiltrations: GVN concern about a possible Korean-type attack, present size of SVN armed forces and time required to recruit, equip, and train additional forces, and time required to bring into effect crash economic-social programs. Diem has given up, at least temporarily, some of his basic philosophy on how to win struggle by asking, first for a bilateral security treaty with US, and secondly and perhaps alternatively for the dispatch of US combat forces (even though ostensibly for guard duty, not for combat unless attacked).

"Obvious first question from US point of view is whether or not world balance of power is sufficiently affected by what happens in SVN to cause us to take measures necessary to prevent loss of SVN to communists. In light of factors as seen from here, physical, moral, and psychological, answer would appear to be clearly affirmative.

"As previously reported, a major factor causing increased GVN anxiety and leading to substantial additional requests of US by GVN last week is situation in Laos and GVN view that approaching solution there is going to transfer communist pressure and force from that country to SVN. Not only GVN, but also ARVN (at least its leaders) strongly hold this view. To what extent it is a factor in public morale is not yet clear....All indications, however, point to a negotiated solution in Laos, eventuating in a neutral govt under Souvanna Phouma. The main focus of US attention and diplomatic endeavor seems now to be on how to assure strict neutrality, including the prevention of the use of Laotian territory for communist aggressive purposes against Laos' neighbors, by means of a proper composition of a Laotian Govt and an international treaty. I should point out in this connection that the GVN cannot be brought to believe (at least, I cannot bring them to believe) that paper guarantees on this score, plus any ICC mechanism comprising Poland, India, and Canada, will in fact protect SVN's western border. They have had similar guarantees in their own country, and these have not worked. All evidence we have here points to conclusion that, if the communist strategists are willing to settle for a neutral Laos at this time, it is for the purpose of concentrating their attack upon SVN, utilizing a neutral Laos for the purpose to whatever extent proves necessary. We have, however, done our best to persuade Diem and others that US policy vis-a-vis Laos is not inconsistent with our determination to protect SVN. We have had a certain measure of success in this, although one should not assume that their failure strongly to dissent, here or in Geneva, indicates consent or even concurrence on the part of these people. They do not think it is polite or productive to argue, but they do make up their own minds and determine their own course of action on the basis of their Diem judgment. They have made up their minds that the presently-envisioned settlement, Laos is going to make things harder for them, and they are now trying to build hedges against that.

"This is major reason for their request for US reinforcements, involving Diem's breaking away, in part at least, from his long-held belief that a victory over communism here, if it is to be enduring, must be achieved by Vietnamese sacrifice and manpower alone. In requesting US reinforcements (and thinking about inviting Chinese), he has adopted an expedient which runs against his own convictions, and he is apparently willing to accept the attendant diminution of his own stature as an independent and self-reliant national leader.

"If, then, a major cause of the deterioration in SVN cannot be attacked in Laos (or the proposed remedy there cannot be convincingly sold to the GVN), our alternative is to go all out to reinforce this country internally. This would seem to involve even faster, more

far-reaching and more expansive measures than those now in train or in prospect. The measures can, I think, be considered under two headings -- those designed to protect from external attack and/or large-scale infiltrations, and those designed to strengthen internal cohesion, to create national will and unity necessary to overcome present large-scale guerrilla activity."

(Saigon Embtel 495 to SecState, 16 October 1961, Section 1 of 2).

"Under measures against external attack, following have been and should be further considered:

1. Means to seal 17th parallel and borders with Laos and Cambodia, defoliated strip, barbed wire (electrified?), mines, patrols, posts, other means. Use of US combat engineer battalions to help with construction.

2. US combat forces, as requested, to be stationed near JIUTH (sic) parallel and possibly other places (towns) in high plateau near Lao border, to free ARVN troops for counter-guerrilla action.

3. Additional fighter-bomber aircraft; additional transport aircraft; best means of supplementing shortage Vietnamese pilots and maintenance personnel (US civilian-contract personnel for non-combat operations commends itself to us).

4. Use of forces other SEATO countries (possibly Philippines or Thailand) for above purposes.

"With any such far-reaching measures on US side, I think that we have right and obligation to assure Diem takes extensive steps on his side to strengthen his govt politically. These measures would relate to (A) organization, (B) rallying mass support, and (C) unifying local elements (i.e., educated class) in support of Govt. steps in the three areas would to some extent be overlapping since improving governmental organization likely for example have favorable effect other areas, while at same time being important in itself for efficient prosecution of war against VC."

(Ibid., Section 2 of 2).

General Taylor's discussions with CINCPAC in Hawaii were reported by Admiral Felt to the JCS on 18 October. Admiral Felt reported a number of questions posed by Taylor's Group and his summary answer. To the question

"What is estimate of military effectiveness and political reliability of armed forces So Vietnam?"

"Response was that Vietnamese Army is a good one but over-

extended and mismanaged because of Diem's unwillingness to give authority to commanders in military chain of command....Morale of enlisted and junior ranks is not good. Generals are frustrated. However believe they will close ranks and be loyal if Diem gives substance to the edict of military command issued about 5 months ago."

On being asked:

"What changes or reforms are we justified in urging on Diem"

"Response was that No. 1 problem is to urge Diem to give authority to his military comdrs and to embark on a campaign planned to clean out infested areas on a time phased basis."

(Naval Message from CINCPAC to JCS, 180250Z Oct 61, Control No. 07497).

This response reflected only a sense of priorities, within MAAG and DOD channels, and also the flexibility of the word "reform" in U.S. policy discussions.

"Dr. Rostow asked if North Vietnam would be considered a red sanctuary in case Phases 3 or 4 of our 32-59 are implemented." (Ibid.)

[These dealt with overt North Vietnamese or ChiCom intervention in South Vietnam respectively.]

"The response was emphatically No. We explained that there is an understanding in SEATO that overt aggression on the part of North Vietnam will be answered immediately by air attacks on LOC, troop concentrations, airfields, and other appropriate targets in North Vietnam....

"Question of use of nuclear weapons came up. Response was that plans were drawn on the assumption that tactical nuclear weapons will be used if required and that we can anticipate requests being made for their use if action expands into a Phase 4 situation."

(Ibid.)

Elaborating on his reply to General Taylor with respect to the pros and cons of introducing US combat forces with a token SEATO flavor into SVN, Admiral Felt sent a separate message (Naval Message, CINCPAC to JCS, 200401Z Oct 61, Control No. 08365):

"A. Pro:

(1) Presence of U.S. forces in SVN, particularly if

deployed to important defensive areas such as plateau region, would mean to communists that overt aggression against SVN will involve U.S. forces from the outset. This eliminates possibility of sudden victory by overt aggression in SVN before US could react. This would settle the question for SVN, and SEAsians as a whole, as to whether we would come to their help. Further, agreement by SEATO to principle of force introduction would strengthen SEATO in world eyes.

(2) Presence of strong U.S. combat forces will influence greatly South Vietnamese will to eliminate the Viet Cong.

(3) If we use U.S. engineers with U.S. military protection to finish Dakto-Ban Het-Attapeu Road in order to enable us to operate near plateau border area, a military corridor of sorts will cut an important part of VC pipeline from North.

(4) U.S. forces will make available larger number ARVN forces for employment against VC. FVNAF tasks accomplished by U.S. forces will decrease proportionately certain RVNAF deficiencies, particularly in logistics, communications, and air support.

(5) U.S. forces in SVN would tend to strengthen Diem's government against pro-red coup, but would not necessarily preclude non-communist coup attempts. *In retrospect we must say yes - we would preclude*

(6) Dividends would accrue from fact our troops could provide variety training for ARVN forces, broadening base now provided by MAAG.

B. Con:

(1) Would stir up big fuss through Asia about reintroduction of forces of white colonialism into SEAsia. Little question that a propaganda issue will be made of this in all world forums including U.A HPVN (sic).

(2) Action could trigger intensification of commie aggression against SEAsia. This may not be all-out overt aggression, but could consist, for example, of the DRV moving full blown combat units through the mountain passes into Southern Laos under excuse that we initiated invasion of SEAsia and they are protecting the flank of North Vietnam.

(3) Politically, presence of U.S. forces could hasten commies to establish so called 'representative government' in South Vietnam.

(4) Aside from offering Viet Cong a political target, US troops would constitute provocative military one, inducing VC to attack/harass it in manner/degree where issue might ultimately force American units active military campaign, or suffer defensive alternative of being pot-shot at to point of embarrassment.

(5) Presence of US troops could induce commies to resort to

related actions such as introduction of red air force elements in North Vietnam and accelerate modernization of DRV military forces.

(6) This would probably mean garrisoning a U.S. Division in SEAsia for an extended period of time in same sense as Army divisions in Korea. However, circumstances differ from Korea. For example, nature of VC warfare such that US units cannot remain long in isolation from conflict realities. Ultimately, they likely to be forced into varying forms of military engagement with VC if only for security against attacks ranging from assassination/sabotage to tactical harassment. In short, we should accept fact that likelihood our troops becoming combat engaged increases in proportion to duration of their stay."

~~Admiral Felt reported his conclusion-~~

(Naval Message CINCPAC to JCS 200401Z Oct 61, Control No. 08365)

Admiral Felt reported his conclusion:

"A summary of the above appears to me to add up in favor of our not introducing U.S. combat forces until we have exhausted other means for helping Diem...."
(Ibid.)

Reporting on his first meeting with Diem, October 18, 1961,

Taylor commented that Diem had produced a "number of surprises." Just before the meeting Diem had declared a national emergency. At the meeting, he "reversed Minister Thuan by not asking for immediate introduction of U.S. ground combat troops." However, Taylor concluded:

"Impression is that Diem is well prepared to press for increased US aid based upon the economic needs generated by disastrous flood in the Delta, the added exposure to communist infiltration he anticipates from a settlement in Laos, and the new atmosphere of concern he detects in Washington."

(Saigon Embtel 510 to SecState, 19 October 1961)

Ambassador Nolting sent a more lengthy description of this

initial meeting:

"In response Taylor's request for description situation in Viet-Nam, Diem gave long historic account developments here. Main point which emerged concerned lack sufficient number of GVN troops. In addition insufficient armed forces he stressed need for large number well equipped and trained Civil Guard and Self

*important advice
that scheme
might be initiated
by N. Lee*

Defense Corps for protection of hamlets to prevent Viet Cong from feeding on countryside....

"Since Diem's description underlined need for large security forces for various defensive purposes, Taylor noted that offensive warfare against guerrillas is less costly than defensive, and asked whether greater offensive action, striking at Viet Cong bases and ambushing them on infiltration trails could not be undertaken...."

(Saigon Embtel 508 to SecState, 18 October 1961)

(Through his discussions in Saigon and later in his report, Taylor was to emphasize the importance of "offensive action" contrasting this to strategies which tied up large numbers of troops "in static defense" to the end of "protecting the population." In other words, this sense of priorities -- reflected in great emphasis on hitting VC base areas -- contrasted with an approach represented by the Head of the British Advisory Mission, RGT Thompson, put predominant emphasis upon protection of the people and isolation of the guerrillas from popular support, represented concurrently in the strategic hamlet program.)

"Taylor said he understood there had been recent discussions of introduction of American or SEATO forces into Viet-Nam and asked why change had occurred in earlier GVN attitude. Diem succinctly replied because of Laos situation. Noting it will take time to build up GVN forces he pointed to enemy's reinforcements through infiltration and increased activities in central Viet-Nam and expressed belief that enemy is trying to escalate proportionally to increase in GVN forces so that GVN will not gain advantage. He asked specifically for tactical aviation, helicopter companies, coastal patrol forces and logistic support (ground transport).

"Diem indicated he thought there would be no particular adverse psychological effect internally from introducing American forces since in his view Vietnamese people regard Communist attack on Viet-Nam as international problem. Rostow inquired whether internal and external political aspects such move could be helped if it were shown clearly to world that this is international problem. Diem gave no direct comment on this suggestion. He indicated two main aspects of this problem: (1) Vietnamese people are worried about absence formal commitment by US to Viet-Nam. They fear that if situation deteriorates Viet-Nam might be abandoned by US. If troops are introduced without a formal commitment they

can be withdrawn at any time and thus formal commitment is even more important in psychological sense. (2) Contingency plan should be prepared re use American forces in Viet-Nam at any time this may become necessary. In this connection Diem seemed to be talking about combat forces. While it was not completely clear what Diem has in mind at present time he seemed to be saying that he wants bilateral defense treaty and preparation of plans for use American forces (whatever is appropriate) but under questioning he did not repeat his earlier idea relayed to me by Thuan that he wanted combat forces."
(Ibid.)

In a conversation the next day with Vice President Tho, Tho told Taylor:

"Intelligence services function poorly because qualified personnel, equipment, and available funds spread too thinly among too many competing services. Central intelligence organization, which was formed at US request, not really functioning, agreed with Taylor that adequate intelligence is of first importance in fighting guerrilla war."

(Saigon Embtel 516 to SecState, 20 Oct 61)

(As in the case of the CIO, the Taylor Group was to hear in the course of their study in Saigon that most of the formal reorganization measures instituted by Diem in response to U.S. pressure, and, tacitly, in fulfilling conditions set by the CIP in return for U.S. full support for the 20,000-man force increase, were being ignored in practice or left unimplemented.)

"Peasants do not support communists politically but are forced help them because of pressure. Necessary to furnish proper protection to peasants including development protective measures at hamlet level. Stressed need for Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps, particularly latter, in sufficient number, better paid, better trained and better armed. Said that center is behind south in developing proper protective measures at village level.

"Under questioning, expressed personal view that CG and SDC should have been increased rather than armed forces...."
(Ibid.)

(From Saigon 516, 20 October 1961)

"....Added current situation in Central Viet-Nam requires some modification of that view but it is still valid for Southern Viet-Nam. Based this on fact that guerrilla war is fought at village level thus requiring local forces who know terrain and people. Also criticized armed forces for being overly-developed for modern warfare rather than being able to fight in mud and water, and said greater stress should be placed on ranger forces."

"....Taylor asked what should be done. Vice Pres in carefully phrased reply stated that US should 'intervene' quickly and intelligently. He eluded questions directed at producing specific recommendations, but did state that US has already given lots of arms and other aid and more will be coming, and what we must insist upon is that this aid be used efficiently. Pointing to Taylor's initial questions about intelligence organizations, he asserted with smile that Taylor already knew what was wrong in Viet Nam."

"Comment: It was clear that Vice Pres, when pressed for his views, was pointing his finger at Diem's methods of government and administration. He said he was not anti-Diem and expressed his support of President. But this was a plea for us to adopt a firm approach in order to make Diem and his government effective. Though lacking specifics, Vice President's appeal was both moving and disturbing in its stress on importance of time. He said six months from now would be too late."

This was not the first time nor the last that Vietnamese officials or elite were to urge the United States to use its leverage to press political change upon the GVN. However, as in other cases, the impact of this upon U.S. predilections was dulled by the perception of pacifity on the part of the Vietnamese given this advice. Nolting's comment on Tho concluded:

"....Obvious, however, that he will not himself stand up to Diem and doubtful that he any longer even tries to make his voice heard by Diem."

At the time I left (Aug 1951) he already felt it was too late (Diem's) - the war
He tried hard in 1959-60 - In 61 Diem did not want to hear him anymore - Surprising that Nolting ignored what was obvious for people in GVN at that time -

".....Guerrilla war fought at local level requires local forces who know terrain and people. Criticized forces as over-developed for modern warfare rather than fight in mud and water. Should stress rangers more....Said US should intervene quickly and intelligently. Eluded questions on specifics. Said US must insist aid be used efficiently....Clear Tho pointing finger at Diem's methods govt and admin. Said not anti-Diem and supported Pres. But this was plea for US to adopt firm approach to make Diem and govt effective. Said 6 months from now would be too late. But obvious he will not stand up to Diem and doubtful he any longer even tries to make his voice heard by Diem."

(from notes -- State-Saigon 516, 20 Oct 61 -- cable being requested)

By the 21st of October, messages from Saigon indicated that Taylor was considering a new alternative for the introduction of a U.S. combat military presence in Vietnam. The Chief MAAG cabled CINCPAC on 23 October:

"Serious flood in Mekong Delta area upstream from Can Tho and Sa Dec (worst since 1937) raises possibility that flood relief could be justification for moving in US military personnel for humanitarian purposes with subsequent retention if desirable. Gen Taylor and Ambassador Nolting evaluating feasibility and desirability...."

(DA IN 164621, Fm ChMAAG Vietnam to CINCPAC, Info JCS and DOD, 23 October 1961)

McGarr reported that flooding was widespread; 500,000 personnel, mostly civilians, were involved:

"Greatest future needs appear to be food, seed and other crop assistance, medical personnel and supplies, construction supplies for buildings, water purification and reconstruction of roads and bridges. Strong indication on part of GVN officials that they have the personnel skills for relief work and only need supplies and funds. USOM providing these....In the event GVN request US assistance in the form of personnel as well as equipment for flood relief, and excellent opportunity immediately is presented for introduction of US military forces for humanitarian purposes...." (Ibid.)

In addition, the types of units which could feasibly be used included helicopter squadrons, medical teams, water supply and water purification units, and

"Engineer Construction Battalions. Actual need not too urgent in flood area; however, they could be used to improve counterinsurgency and contingency posture after minimal repairs to roads and bridges in Delta area....

"By utilizing US forces in areas controlled by ARVN, Security would not be a serious problem; however, it must be recognized that any US troops introduced must be prepared to protect themselves and terms of reference and status of forces agreements agreeable to US and Vietnamese governments completely spelled out.

"If as result of Taylor visit and recommendations decision is made to support Diem with US troops, this is an excellent opportunity to minimize adverse publicity."

(Ibid.)

Summing up for CINCPAC, Taylor's discussions with Diem and Generals Ty, Khanh and Big Minh, General McGarr noted:

"....Diem retreat at least for moment re his (Thuan's) previous request for U.S. combat troops to contingency planning for same...."

McGarr appreciation for

"Gen Taylor's urging for overall national plan and excellent discussion pressing for offensive spirit and actions, both long recommended here...."

(DA IN 163712, ChMAAG Vietnam to CINCPAC, Info JCS, 200713Z Oct 61)

Generals Khanh and Ty both made requests addressed primarily to the RVNAF Mission of repelling an invasion from North Vietnam, General Ty commented that "if Europe should 'blow up' there would be an attack from the north." General Taylor "left no doubt his opinion that counter guerrilla war was primary." He stressed the "need for mobility and absolute necessity for improved intelligence." The discussion the same day, 19 October, with Duom Va Minh, Commanding General of the Field Command, was more far reaching.

"Big Minh was pessimistic and clearly and frankly outlined his personal feeling that the military was not being properly supported. He said not only Viet Cong grown alarmingly, but

proposals of MAAG were discussed due to these problems.

"When analyzed, most of Minh's comments in military field are occasioned by lack of overall coordination and cooperation. This reemphasizes absolute necessity for overall plan which would clearly delineate responsibility and create a team effort...."

*This was in 1951
Minh seemed
quite a political
person*

that Vietnamese armed forces were losing support of the people. As example, he pointed out marked decrease in amount of information given by population. Minh said GVN should discontinue favoring certain religions, and correct present system of selecting province chiefs. At this point Minh was extremely caustic in commenting on lack of ability, military and administrative, of certain province chiefs. Minh was better about province chief's role in military chain of command saying that although Gen McGarr had fought for and won on the single of command which had worked for few months, old habits were now returning, also, on urging from Gen McGarr he had gone on offensive, but province chiefs had not cooperated to extent necessary. He discussed his inability to get cooperation from GVN agencies on developing overall plans for conduct of counterinsurgency. Minh also discussed need to bring sects back into fold as these are anti-communist. Although above not new Minh seemed particularly discouraged."

The Chief of MAAG commented on this list of complaints in a way highly revealing of the ruling appreciation in MAAG circles of the problems of Vietnam. The notion of an "overall plan as a solution to all problems" is evident here; time and again, on MAAG urging, the establishment of a plan became the central quid pro quo that the U.S. demanded for increased assistance (although even this condition was dropped, each time, in the face of Vietnamese resistance). Just how a plan was to "create" a determined effort in the face of repeated evidence that paper plans and reorganizations were simply ignored or remained ineffective given Vietnamese attitudes and practices. Moreover, such problems as lack of support of the Vietnamese armed forces by the people, as shown in failure of the population to give information, and the lack of ability of province chiefs (who controlled provincial forces) as well as the problem of alienation of the anti-communist sects, were not apparently regarded by McGarr as military problems, though they certainly bore directly upon central problems in internal security.

Or if McGarr would regard it as in the military field, it is again not clear just how the national plan was going to help or what other

On 9 October 1961, the JCS replied to a memorandum from the Deputy SecDef, dated 5 Oct 61, on the subject "Concept of Use of Seato Forces in South Vietnam (C), (JCSM 716-61)". The JCS rejected the two principle military proposals of that memo. They regarded the first -- the use of SEATO forces ^{at} the greatest possible number of entry points along the whole SVN border (except for points of the 17th parallel now held by the South Vietnamese Army) -- as not feasible in that:

"a. SEATO forces will be deployed over a border of several hundred miles and will be attacked piecemeal or bypassed at the Viet Cong's own choice.

"b. It may reduce but cannot stop infiltration of Viet Cong personnel and material.

"c. It deploys SEATO forces in the weakest defense points should DRV or CHICOM forces intervene.

"d. It compounds the problems of communications and logistical support."

The second alternative, of using U.S. forces solely to cover the 17th parallel, although feasible, was militarily unsound:

"a. The 17th parallel is not a main avenue of approach being used by the Viet Cong.

"b. North Vietnam may interpret such SEATO action as preparation for aggression against them, thus promoting the possibility of communist harassment and destruction of friendly combat and logistic forces concentrated near the parallel, if not escalation."

The JCS went on to express reservations about any concept that limited deployment ^{solely} to Vietnam:

"....Any concept which deals with the defense of Southeast Asia that does not include all or a substantial portion of Laos is, from a military standpoint, unsound. To concede the majority of northern and central Laos would leave three quarters of the border of Thailand exposed and thus invite an expansion of communist military action. To concede southern Laos would open the flanks of both Thailand South Vietnam as well as expose Cambodia. Any attempt to combat insurgency in South Vietnam, while holding areas

in Laos essential to the defense of Thailand and South Vietnam and, at the same time, putting troops in Thailand, would require an effort on the part of the United States alone on the order of magnitude of at least three divisions plus supporting units. This would require an additional two divisions from the United States.

"What is needed is not the spreading out of our forces throughout Southeast Asia but rather a concentrated effort in Laos where a firm stand can be taken saving all or substantially all of Laos which would, at the same time, protect Thailand and protect the borders of South Vietnam.

"The over-all objective could best be served by the implementation of SEATO Plan 5/61, or a variation thereof, now. This would accomplish the objective of assisting to secure the border of South Vietnam against the infiltration of personnel and material in support of the Viet Cong thus freeing Vietnamese forces to conduct more effective offensive operations in South Vietnam. In addition, this action would stem further communist gains in Laos and, at the same time, give concrete evidence of US determination to stand firm against further communist advances world-wide."

They went on to present a course of action in the event that implementation of SEATO Plan V was not considered politically acceptable at the time, that

"....could provide a degree of assistance to the Government of South Vietnam to regain control of its own territory, and could free certain South Vietnamese forces for offensive actions against the Viet Cong. While the Joint Chiefs of Staff agree that implementation of this limited course of action would not provide for the defense of Thailand or Laos, nor contribute substantially or permanently to solution of the over-all problem of defense of Southeast Asia, they consider the Plan preferable to either of the two military possibilities described in referenced memorandum."

Assuming that forces available would include the British Commonwealth Brigade, Pakistan, Philippine, and U.S. forces and a limited amount of Thai forces, the concept of operations called for SEATO ground forces of approximately one division strength (11,000) to deploy to the high plateau region of the Pleiku area freeing Vietnamese forces to conduct effective offensive operations elsewhere, with further deployments into SVN at the discretion of the SEATO field force commander.

"The forces involved in support of this concept would include those forces now committed to support SEATO Plan 5/61 less both the Thai commitment and the US commitment to the Central Reserve. This force would be composed of approximately 9600 combat forces, of which about 5000 would be U.S. Headquarters units, air component, logistic and other support units would total about 13,200. This would provide a total force of about 22,800."

(Appendix A to JCSM-716-61, p. 3)

Of particular interest in this plan was the discussion of the possible Communist reaction, which spelled out the assumptions (on the probable nature of Communist overt intervention in South Vietnam) underlying the estimates of ^{possible} "ultimate" force requirements that were to appear in later memos to the President, *(i.e. 6 US divisions, 205,000 men, if the North Vietnamese and Chinese intervened overtly)*.

"Bloc overt aggression to counter the movement of SEATO forces into South Vietnam is considered unlikely. The most probable course of action by the communists would be continued use of insurgents and infiltration. However, if the Bloc did decide to act overtly to counter the introduction of SEATO forces into the area, this action would probably follow, in general, the pattern set forth below:

GROUND ACTIONS

"a. Basically an infantry invasion of South Vietnam and Laos and deployed in strength and direction as follows:

(1) Five divisions on the North/South Vietnam border to Saigon along the coastal route via Dong Ha - Tourane - Binh Dinh.

(2) One division (light) to Vientiane via Xieng - Khouang - Paksane.

(3) One division (light) to Thakhek and Savannekhet via Mugia Pass and Keo Neua Pass.

(4) A follow-up force of up to six divisions moving as follows:

(a) Two divisions to Saigon or Bangkok via Lao Bao Pass - down the lower Mekong Valley along Route 13 to Saigon or across the Mekong River to Bangkok.

(b) Two divisions to Bangkok via Routes 7, 8 and 13 through Laos into Thailand and on to Bangkok.

(c) Two divisions to be held in reserve along the North/South Vietnam border to be available to put additional momentum along the coastal route, or to effect a subsidiary effort in the Kontum-Pleiku Plateau.

"b. A secondary effort, or threat thereof, by about nine Chinese Communist divisions into Burma and Northern Thailand, which could be supported as follows:

(1) Three divisions, one lightly equipped, to northern Thailand via northwest Burma.

(2) Six divisions toward Rangoon along the Burma Road and via Myitkyina to Mandalay, then south in the internal transport system of Burma.

"c. There would probably be a build-up in North Vietnam and possibly a build-up along the China-Burma border before any invasion was initiated. The invasion would probably be on the broadest possible front employing lightly equipped troops to infiltrate between defending forces and thereby minimizing the effects of nuclear weapons against deployed ground troops. These infiltrating forces would be supported by columns advancing quickly down main routes. Battalion-size or smaller airborne units might be used, chiefly to seize and hold key features such as bridges, airfields, critical road junctions. The communists would exploit to the fullest their ability to infiltrate through the most difficult country and would not necessarily be tied to the highways and roads. Large numbers of porters and pack animals would be available and jungle trails would be used to a great extent, though this would restrict the speed of attack and the weight of equipment that could be used."

* * *

"REACTION TO CONTINGENCIES

"1. If North Vietnamese forces overtly intervened, the SEATO forces would have to be increased from the equivalent of approximately one division at the initiation of the SEATO Plan to twelve divisions, seven Regimental Combat Teams and five battalions. In addition, the SEATO force would have air and naval superiority. Such a force is considered adequate to defeat the North Vietnamese forces.

"2. US force contribution to the enlarged SEATO force required to combat such DRV action would include two Army divisions, one Marine division/wing team and five USAF tactical squadrons deployed in Thailand and South Vietnam. The US forces would be increased

from 14,000 to a total of approximately 129,000, not including Navy forces. One division for this force must come from the continental United States. This could require the call up of one division plus other appropriate forces to maintain the US strategic reserve.

"3. The mission of the enlarged SEATO force would be to defend Laos and South Vietnam against attack by forces of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and to inflict a quick and decisive defeat on the military forces of the DRV...."

"4. If the Chinese Communists intervene, whether by regular or 'volunteer' forces, political authorization for essential military actions must be anticipated since prompt counteractions would be required. There would be issues whether to attack selected targets in South China with conventional weapons and whether to initiate use of nuclear weapons against targets in direct support of Chinese operations in Laos.

"5. In this event the SEATO force would be increased to fifteen divisions and eight RCTs (278,000) deployed in the defense of Southeast Asia.

"6. The US contribution to this force would be three ground divisions deployed in Thailand and South Vietnam and one Marine Division/Wing Team, prepared for amphibious assault operations against North Vietnam as the military situation dictated. Two divisions and additional air forces would have to come from the continental United States. This could require the call up of two additional divisions plus other appropriate forces to maintain the US strategic reserve.

"7. The mission of the SEATO force would be expanded to defend Southeast Asia against attack by Chinese Communist forces and those of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The general concept of operation would be to launch air and naval attacks, to delay the enemy's advance with local forces and interdict his lines of communications with air and naval forces, while conducting an unremitting air and naval offensive to destroy the enemy's war-making capacity."

(Appendix A to JCSM 716-61)

9 draft
An

~~XXXX~~ SNIE of 9 October 1961 discussed the probable Communist

reactions to SEATO undertakings in South Vietnam of the above nature (draft SNIE 10-3-61). The specific assumption for purposes of the estimate was that:

"...in response to an appeal from the Government of Vietnam (GVN), SEATO ground, naval, and air forces numbering

about 25,000 are committed to patrol the GVN coast and to secure the GVN-Laotian border against incursions or infiltration from the Communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in North Vietnam. The SEATO objective, which will be ~~publicly announced~~ publicly announced, is to stop external Communist assistance to the Viet Cong Communist guerrillas, while avoiding involvement in the internal struggle in South Vietnam."

The SNIE estimated^{assumed} that the Communist Bloc did not commit their forces to a large scale military attack against SVN or Laos:

"...the Communist Bloc would not commit their forces to a large-scale military attack against South Vietnam or Laos in response to the assumed SEATO action...."

"...we believe that the DRV would seek at first to test the seriousness and effectiveness of the SEATO effort by subjecting the SEATO forces and their lines of communication to harassment, ambush, and guerrilla attack. The Communists would probably estimate that by using their Viet Cong apparatus in South Vietnam, and by committing experienced guerrilla forces from North Vietnam* [* Approximately 90,000 Vietnamese Communist troops, most of them from south and central Vietnam, were evacuated to North Vietnam in the regroupment of forces following the Indochina War. The DRV has maintained relatively intact a large part of this pool of manpower experienced in guerrilla operations in South Vietnam, drawing upon it for cadres to reinforce the Viet Cong.] in guerrilla operations in territory long familiar to them, and by exploiting the opportunities offered by the sizable junk traffic in coastal waters, they could severely harass the SEATO land forces and penetrate the SEATO blockade...."

"While seeking to test the SEATO forces, the DRV would probably not relax its Viet Cong campaign against the GVN to any significant extent. Meanwhile, Communist strength in South Laos would probably be increased by forces from North Vietnam to guard against an effort to partition Laos or an attack against the Pathet Lao forces. The Soviet airlift would probably be increased with a heavier flow of military supply into south Laos, and the Communists would probably intensify their efforts to establish a secure route for motor traffic into the south. The establishment of a coalition government in Laos under Souvanna Phouma probably would not significantly reduce Communist infiltration of men and equipment from North to South Vietnam through Laos."

"....In any event, the SEATO commitment in South Vietnam would probably have to be continued over a prolonged period. It might be part of Communist tactics to play upon possible SEATO weariness over maintaining substantial forces and accepting losses, in South Vietnam over a long period of time."

"....The Asian members of SEATO would find renewed confidence in the organization and the US, if the plan were to go well. If, on the other hand, the SEATO action were to become costly, prolonged, or to involve heavy casualties, the Asian members would soon become disenchanted and look to the US to "do something" to lessen the burden and to solve the problem. The UK and France would be likely to oppose the assumed SEATO action, and their reluctance to participate could be overcome only with great difficulty, if at all."

In forwarding this draft to the Secretary of Defense on 10 October, William Bundy accompanied it with a personal statement of his own views:

"For what one man's feel is worth, mine -- based on very close touch with Indochina in the 1954 war and civil war afterwards till Diem took hold -- is that it is really now or never if we are to arrest the gains being made by the Viet Cong. Walt Rostow made the point yesterday that the Viet Cong are about to move, by every indication, from the small unit basis to a moderate battalion-size basis. Intelligence also suggests that they may try to set up a 'provisional government' like Xieng Khuang (though less legitimate appearing) in the very Kontum area into which the present initial plan would move SEATO forces. If the Viet Cong movement 'blooms' in this way, it will almost certainly attract all the back-the-winner sentiment that understandably prevails in such cases and that beat the French in early 1954 and came within an ace of beating Diem in early 1955.

"An early and hard-hitting operation has a good chance (70% would be my guess) of arresting things and giving Diem a chance to do better and clean up. Even if we follow up hard, on the lines the JCS are working out after yesterday's meeting, however, the chances are not much better that we will in fact be able to clean up the situation. It all depends on Diem's effectiveness, which is very problematical. The 30% chance is that we would wind up like the French in 1954; white men can't win this kind of fight.

"On a 70-30 basis, I would myself favor going in. But if we let, say, a month go by before we move, the odds will slide (both short-term shock effect and long-term chance) down to 60-40, 50-50, and so on. Laos under a Souvanna Phouma deal is more likely than not to go sour, and will more and more make things difficult in South Viet-Nam, which again underscores the element of time."

(*Italics in orig*).

(Acting ASD(ISA) memo for the Secretary, 10 October 1961, Subject: Viet-Nam, Ref: 1 19126/61, SecDef Cont No. SD-1787)

1787

unavailable

In the light of later decisions, and the events over the next six years, Bundy's assessment in October 1961, ^{that} with the chances of "cleaning up" the situation in the long run, were ^{is not too far off} .49 (.7 x .7) ^{if} the U.S. were to go into Vietnam within the month, with a "hard-hitting" operation, these odds slightly sliding to .36 (.6 x .6) if action were delayed until the end of the year. This calculation, plus the unusually explicit mention of the possibility that we might "wind up like the French in 1954" presented a picture that could not be ^{faulted} faltered for ^{over}optimism: ^{not, in retrospect, for lack of realism.}

It was three days after the presentation of the JCS plan, and the above assessment by Bundy that Secretary Thuan passed on the request to Ambassador Nolting for US combat units : in South Vietnam. The domestic pressures internal to South Vietnam that had lead to this major reversal of Diemist policy -- in the context both of growing VC pressure and infiltration through Laos, and of U.S. policy in Laos -- ^{were} suggested in a DDI (CIA) briefing, 14 October 1961:

"Major immediate threat to Diem is not a military takeover by the Communists but the mounting danger of an internal coup by disgruntled military and civilian members of the government who are critical of Diem's leadership.

"A. These critics hold that Diem's heavy hand in all operations of the government is not only hampering the anti-Communist military effort but is steadily alienating the populace.

"B. Coup rumors, similar to those which preceeded last November's abortive attempt, are again being heard in Saigon.

"1. The recent series of dramatic Viet Cong guerrilla successes--particularly the sacking of a provincial capital less than fifty miles from Saigon--probably have served to encourage internal plotting against Diem.

"C. Although the Communists were caught flat footed by last November's coup effort, recently captured documents reveal detailed Communist plans to capitalize on the confusion which would attend any new non-Communist coup in Saigon.

"2. Even if a coup in Saigon at this time would not

result in an immediate takeover by the Communists, prospects are that the new regime--even a military ~~in~~ junta--would probably be even less effective against the Viet Cong than the incumbent one."

Thus, of the two parallel dangers to the Diem regime noted in intelligence estimates since early 1960, a threat of an internal coup by non-Communist elements had once again surged forward to first place.

On October 25, 1961, Taylor cabled home "the essential conclusions which we have reached at the end of a week of briefings, consultations, and field trips." (From Saigon 536, October 25, 1961) Subsequently, Taylor was to cable his personal recommendations in two Top Secret "Eyes Only" cables to the President from Baguio, 2 November 1961 (SecDef Control No. 2432). These cables were apparently extremely closely held, and are no longer to be found within the Department of Defense. Subsequent to the return of the Taylor Group, the "Report on General Taylor's Mission to South Vietnam" was distributed dated 3 November 1961, without General Taylor's personal recommendations; Taylor's covering letter to the President alluded to "my recommendations, already laid before you by cable" as representing "the emergency program which we feel our government should implement without delay." [Inasmuch as the cables spelling out Taylor's recommendations to the President have not been available to this study (nor were they accessible to earlier State or Department of Army studies) particular interest attaches to this and several other cables from Taylor sent from Saigon and Bangkok that give his tentative conclusions which he had discussed with President Diem. No evidence available to this study suggests that his final recommendations differed in any significant way from the conclusions discussed below. Since this cable is thus the best available expression of General Taylor's personal recommendations, it is reproduced here in full.] Taylor began his conclusions with the blunt message that the crisis in South Vietnam was a "crisis of confidence" brought on not only by the build-up of the VC but by "Western policy in Laos" (i.e., President Kennedy's decision to seek a compromise settlement in Laos through negotiations).

"1. The essential conclusions which we have reached at the end of a week of briefings, consultations, and field trips follow:

"A. There is a critical political-military situation in SVN brought on by Western policy in Laos and by the continued build-up of the VC and their recent successful attacks. These circumstances coupled with the major flood disaster in the southwestern provinces have combined to create a deep and pervasive crisis of confidence and a serious loss in national morale.

"B. In the field, the military operations against the VC are ineffective because of the absence of reliable intelligence on the enemy, an unclear and unresponsive channel of command responsibility in the armed forces and the tactical immobility of the VN ground forces. This immobility leads to a system of passive, fragmented defense conceding the initiative to the enemy and leaving him free to pick the targets of attack. The harassed population exposed to these attacks turn to the government for better protection and the latter responds by assigning more static missions to the Army units, thus adding to their immobility. In the end, the Army is allowed neither to train nor to fight but awaits enemy attacks in relative inaction.

"C. The situation in the Saigon is volatile but, while morale is down and complaints against the government are rife, there is not hard evidence of a likely coup against Diem. He still has no visible rival or replacement.

"2. To cope with the foregoing situation, we are considering recommending a number of possible forms of GVN-US cooperation to reverse the present downward trend, stimulate an offensive spirit and buildup morale. In company with Ambassador Nolting, Dr. Rostow and Mr. Mendenhall, I discussed some of these Oct 24 with Diem and Thuan, advancing them as personal ideas to which I was seeking their informal reaction. The following outline, distributed in French translation at the start of the interview, indicates the scope of the discussion.

"A. Improvement of intelligence on V.C.: The available intelligence on V.C. insurgency is inadequate both for tactical requirements and for basis of judgment of situation at governmental levels. A joint GVN-US effort should be able to improve organization, techniques and end product to mutual advantage both parties.

"B. Joint survey of security situation at provincial level: The current situation can best be appraised at provincial level where the basic intelligence is found, the incidents occur, and the defenses are tested. The problems vary from province to province and hence require local analysis on the spot. Such a survey should result in better understanding of such important matters as quality of basic intelligence on V.C., needs of civil guard and self defense corps, command relationships between provincial and Army officials and conditions under which assumption of offensive might be possible.

"C. Improvement of Army mobility: It appears that size of ARVN can not be much increased before end 1962, to make it more effective and allow it to cope with increasing number of V.C., it must be given greater mobility. Such mobility can come from two sources, (1) freeing Army from static missions and (2) making available to it improved means of transport, notably helicopters and light aircraft. Both methods should be considered.

"D. Blocking infiltration into high plateau: Increase in enemy forces in high plateau requires special measures for defense and for counter-guerrilla actions. It is suggested that a carefully tailored 'border ranger force' be organized from existing ranger units and introduced into the difficult terrain along the Laos/Vietnam frontier for attack and defense against the Viet Cong. This force should be trained and equipped for extended service on the frontier and for operations against the communications lines of the VC who have infiltrated into the high plateau and adjacent areas.

"E. Introduction of US military forces: GVN is faced with major civil problem arising from flood devastation in western provinces. Its allies should offer help to GVN according to their means. In the case of O.S., two ways of rendering help should be considered. One is of emergency type, such as offer of U.S. military helicopters for reconnaissance of conditions of flooded areas and for emergency delivery medical supplies and like. A more significant contribution might be a flood relief task force, largely military in composition, to work with GVN over an extended period for rehabilitation of area. Such a force might contain engineer, medical, signal, and transportation elements as well as combat troops for the protection of relief operations. Obviously, such a military source would also provide U.S. military presence in Viet Nam and would constitute military reserve in case of heightened military crisis.

"F. Actions to emphasize national emergency and beginning of a new phase in the war: We should consider jointly all possible measures to emphasize turning point has been reached in dealing with communist aggression. Possible actions might include appeal to United Nations, an announcement by GVN of governmental changes to cope with crisis and exchange of letters between the two heads of state expressing their partnership in a common cause.

"3. Diem's reaction on all points was favorable. He expressed satisfaction with idea of introducing U.S. forces in connection with flood relief activities, observing that even the opposition elements in his congress had joined with the majority in supporting need for presence of U.S. forces. In the course of the meeting, nothing was formally proposed or approved but the consensus was that the points considered might form framework for a program of increased GVN-US cooperation offering promise of overcoming many of the current difficulties of GVN. There were no specific figures discussed with regard to such matters as troop strengths, additional equipment, or flood relief.

"4. As follow-up on this session with Diem, in consultation with Embassy and MAAG, we will develop specific recommendations for carrying out the concepts discussed with Diem. To assist us, Ambassador Nolting in obtaining further data on the flood from the GVN. We have agreed with Diem to guard against any premature leaks of these matters under consideration.

"5. Because of the importance of acting rapidly once we have made up our minds, I will cable my recommendations to Washington enroute home."

(Saigon 536 to SecState, 25 October 1961, Sections 1 & 2 of 2, and Saigon 544, 25 October 1961 correcting 536).

It is noteworthy that there is no mention in this cable of any quid pro quos from Diem for the increased aid proposed here, nor any indication that such conditions were discussed with Diem; specifically, there did not appear to be any discussion of the need for reciprocal measures by Diem in the field of "liberalization." This conversation, in which Diem expressed approval for the proposed flood relief task force, which was to include U.S. combat forces, was apparently the basis for Taylor's later references (see below) to Diem's "request for troops." (The request relayed through Thuan earlier had presumably been negated by the discussion in the first meeting of the Taylor Group with Diem; however, Diem's reported response to the Taylor proposal here, and his comments on the desire of many Vietnamese elements for a U.S. combat presence, could be taken as constituting a renewed "request.") At the same time, Taylor sent a cable much more restricted in distribution on the specific point concerning U.S. combat forces.

"....With regard to the critical question of introducing U.S. military forces into VN:

"My view is that we should put in a task force consisting largely of logistical troops for the purpose of participating in flood relief and at the same time of providing a U.S. military presence in VN capable of assuring Diem of our readiness to join him in a military showdown with the Viet Cong or Viet Minh. To relate the introduction of these troops to the needs of flood relief

seems to me to offer considerable advantages in VC and abroad. It gives a specific humanitarian task as the prime reason for the coming of our troops and avoids any suggestion that we are taking over responsibility for the security of the country. As the task is a specific one, we can extricate our troops when it is done if we so desire. Alternatively, we can phase them into other activities if we wish to remain longer.

"The strength of the force I have in mind on the order of 6-8000 troops. Its initial composition should be worked out here after study of the possible requirements and conditions for its use and subsequent modifications made with experience.

"In addition to the logistical component, it will be necessary to include some combat troops for the protection of logistical operations and the defense of the area occupied by U.S. forces. Any troops coming to VN may expect to take casualties.

"Needless to say, this kind of task force will exercise little direct influence on the campaign against the V.C. It will, however, give a much needed shot in the arm to national morale, particularly if combined with other actions showing that a more effective working relationship in the common cause has been established between the GVN and the U.S."

(From Saigon 537, 25 Oct 61, from General Taylor, Eyes Only for the President, Rusk, Under Secretary Johnson, Secretary McNamara, General Lemnitzer)

Lacking General Taylor's cable of recommendations from Baguio, the above cable is the only place in the documentation available to this study in which a tentative figure is given by Taylor as to the size of the U.S. task force he proposed sending to Vietnam. The above proposal appears to correspond to the second or lesser of the two alternatives. In terms of the alternatives mentioned in the Gilpatrick memo for the record of 11 October 1961, the proposal for 6-8000 troops, an unspecified number of which would be combat troops, appears to fall in between the two proposals that Taylor was to investigate. The first of these, presented in the Viet Nam Task Force paper "Concept for Intervention in Vietnam,"

called for "11,000 combat ground forces, small air forces, naval forces to assist in sea patrol, and support forces, for a total of 22,800 in Vietnam," to be based at Pleiku and have broad rules of engagement in combating the VC. The alternative plan called for "fewer U.S. combat forces...and with a more limited objective than dealing with the VC; in other words of which small forces would probably go in at Tourane and possibly _____ the southern border, principally for the purpose of establishing a U.S. presence in Vietnam." Taylor had concluded that some combat presence was a minimum, indispensable requirement for achieving the necessary assurance of U.S. commitment and boost to Vietnamese morale, and the flood problem seemed to him a usefully convenient occasion for establishing such a presence, while at the same time providing the rationale for a limited commitment of troops, limited both in its numbers and in duration of stay. Taylor spelled this out in a cable a few days later from Bangkok in which he criticized a tendency to regard the concept of a flood relief task force as essentially "a cover plan" for the introduction of U.S. troops into Vietnam.

"This concept does not amount to a cover as it undertakes to conceal nothing. It does give our forces a good reason for coming and the termination of flood relief, a matter at least of months, would give our forces a good reason for going. In the meantime they would have satisfied Diem's request for troops with a commitment far smaller than that required to make a military or psychological impression if the announced purpose was merely to render aid to suppress the VC insurgency. If we come in for this latter purpose, we will have to talk in terms of the three divisions contained in the current SEATO Plan 7."

(From Bangkok 626, October 27)

In a final conversation with Taylor in Moscow on October 25th, Diem stressed the importance of the reinforcement of aviation. Taylor and Nolting made clear that they ^{From} (Saigon 541, 25 October 1961)

"....envisaged helicopters piloted by Americans and constituting American units under American commanders which would cooperate with Vietnamese military commands...."

Taylor encouraged Diem to work with Nolting to develop specifics with respect to the "political-psychological point" raised in their discussion of October 24 of "actions to emphasize national emergency and beginning of a new phase in the war" such as "appeal."

"....Taylor pointed out this would be very useful to him in Washington because he will be faced with question that, if program he proposes is adopted, what will be chances of early success. In response Thuan's question asking for exact meaning of this point in Taylor's paper, latter said there has been loss of confidence among both Vietnamese and American people about situation in Vietnam and we need to determine together what measures can be taken to restore confidence. Rostow commented that secret of turning point is offensive action. Diem stated complete psychological mobilization required so that everything can be done to raise potential GVN forces and damage enemy's potential. He referred to GVN efforts in past to collaborate more closely with us in military planning and said these efforts had run up against wall of secrecy surrounding us and SEATO military plans."

(Ibid).

Once again, as in the conversation of October 24th, discussion on this point is as noteworthy for what it did not seem to include as for what it does cover. The memo presented to Diem on the earlier occasion had mentioned the passing as among the possible actions "to emphasize the national emergency," "an announcement by GVN of governmental changes to cope with crisis." Nothing more specific or emphatic seems to have arisen in any of the discussions by the Taylor group directly with Diem; and, indeed, the comment reported by Rostow above that "the secret of turning point is offensive action" would seem to conform more to Diem's

*What a fraud!
This looks absolutely
like the attitudes
of the Vietnamese
courtiers in front of
Diem, making a timid
suggestion then
retracting immediately
for fear of Diem's
displeasure!*

foretelling

own emphasis on military action against the VC as the key "reform" needed to restore confidence rather than radical changes either of an administrative or a political nature. Diem renewed his requests for spraying facilities for destruction of Viet Cong rice crops and for armored boat assistance. In a concluding request, "Diem expressed desire for General Lansdale's services here in Vietnam." He asked Taylor to thank President Kennedy for his interest in Vietnam.

The Taylor mission left Saigon for Bangkok and Baguio with the understanding that the Embassy in Saigon would work out some specifics on the general proposals to be made by the Taylor mission, which were to include:

- a. improvement of intelligence on the Viet Cong
- b. a joint survey of the security situation at the provincial level
- c. improvement of Army mobility (including the prompt provision of U.S. military helicopters up to about three companies)
- d. blocking infiltration in the high plateau by a border ranger force
- e. the introduction of U.S. military forces in the form of a flood relief task force (composition, schedule of arrival and location to be recommended by the Embassy in Saigon), and
- f. actions to emphasize the national emergency and a new phase in the war.

(From Bangkok 625, 27 October 1961)

On the last point, the Taylor mission proposed to discuss in Washington the actions which could be taken "to focus attention upon the new phase which we are entering in conjunction with the GVN" including

a letter from President Kennedy indicating to President Diem "the new forms of support which the U.S. government offers," while the Embassy in Saigon would urge upon President Diem "the need to announce governmental changes calculated to raise confidence in Saigon and Washington in the probability of success of the new program." On October 27, Thuan, following up with Nolting on specifics of the Taylor mission's proposals, responded to the particular question of top level GVN organization by suggesting that President Diem be persuaded to delegate full authority and responsibility, subject to his policy directives, to an Executive Board chaired by Ngo Dinh Nhu. This proposal was an interesting contrast to the proposals urged by the previous Ambassador, Durbrow, on Diem just a year earlier, the burden of which was the necessity of removing Nhu from the policy process -- indeed, sending him and his wife out of the country -- for urgent political reasons; in exchanges between the State Department and Durbrow on the subject of GVN reorganization, the notion of Diem's delegating authority to an Executive Committee was easily advanced in large part a device for reducing the influence of the Nhu family on operations. Thuan pointed out to Nolting on this occasion, "as previously,"

"....that only person to whom President would delegate so much authority, and leave it delegated, was his brother Nhu. Said he felt such a board would materially improve GVN performance. Asked my reaction, I told him that I did not wish to meddle officially in questions involving personnel of Government of Vietnam, but that I say officially that any organization under President Diem's policy guidance which would give government greater efficiency and cut down of reaction time would be a welcome development, and is in fact an urgent necessity."

"I added that I did not know personally Mr. Nhu's ability as an executive, I had known him rather as a planning and philosophical type; but if Thuan and others felt that this would improve top-level organization and efficiency of GVN I personally would be inclined to try it. Thuan said he and others felt that this would make a definite improvement; that they could guarantee faster

Very
characteristic!
W/ho is
whom.

and better executive performance; and that in any it was only feasible way to bring about a delegation of authority by the President and have it stick...."

(From Saigon, October 28, 1961, Sections 1, 2 and 3)

Subsequent experience with Nhu's influence over the strategic hamlet program indicated that a delegation of authority to Nhu would indeed have benefits in the direction of executive efficiency; yet it _____ in political acceptability, increasingly evident in 1963 and ultimately near-fatal, which were scarcely raised in Nolting's reported conversations on this matter, in contrast to the discussions of 1960. Meanwhile, in a visit in Thailand with the Prime Minister, Taylor outlined to Sarit his impressions of the Vietnam situation concentrating on the weakness of the intelligence organization and poor utilization of the Vietnamese armed forces. These two deficiencies, Ambassador Young noted in his report of the conversations, existed in Thailand on a peacetime basis.

"....Sarit very interested. He then asked if foreign troops would be needed in Viet-Nam, remarking that he thought US should send troops there. General Taylor reported that he had not formulated his views on this question but pointed out logistical assistance in the flooded areas might be useful. Prime Minister thought that would be a good thing to do but commented as an aside in Thailand (sic) that he wanted to know if US would send in combat troops as well."

(From Bangkok 634, 28 October 1961)

Sarit went on to express views on Laos similar to those of Diem.

"....On Laos Prime Minister said he did not believe we can bargain for real peace in Laos 'through the Harriman approach', because Souvanna Phoma will never succeed....."

(Ibid).

The prevailing state of Vietnamese opinion including attitudes toward U.S. policy in Laos and the related need for U.S. combat forces were graphically described by Nolting on 31 October 1961.

"Our conversations over past ten days with Vietnamese in various walks of life show virtually unanimous desire for introduction U.S. forces into Viet-Nam. This based on unsolicited remarks from cabinet ministers, National Assembly Deputies, University professors, students, shopkeepers, and oppositionists. Dr. Tran Dinh De, level-headed Minister of Health, told Embassy officer Oct 29 that while GVN could continue resist communists for while longer if US troops not introduced, it could not win alone against commies. National Assembly members, according to Lai Tu, leader Personalist Community, unanimously in favor entry US forces. Diem told us while Gen Taylor was here that he had consulted National Assembly Committee on this question and had received favorable response. Even an oppositionist like Ex-Foreign Minister Tran Van Do has told us US forces are needed and is apparently so strongly convinced of this that he did not suggest any conditions precedent about political changes by Diem. Am Consul Hue reports that opinion among intellectuals and government officials in that city is also almost unanimously in favor of introduction of American combat troops. MAAG believes on basis private conversations and general attitude Vietnamese military personnel toward us that Vietnamese armed forces would likewise welcome introduction US forces.

"General Vietnamese desire for introduction US forces arises from serious morale decline among populace during recent weeks because of deterioration in security and horrible death through torture and mutilation to which Col Nam subjected. Expanded VC infiltration has brought fully home to Vietnamese the fact that US has not intervened militarily in Laos to come to rescue of anti-communists. Now that they see Viet-Nam approaching its own crucial period, paramount question in their minds is whether US will give armed support to anti-communist GVN or whether it will back down when chips are down. Vietnamese thus want US forces introduced in order to demonstrate US determination to stick it out with them against Communists. They do not want to be victims of political settlement with communists. This is especially true of those publicly identified as anti-communist like Dean Vu Quoc Thuc who collaborated with Dr. Eugene Staley on Joint Experts Report.

"Most Vietnamese whose thoughts on this subject have been developed are not thinking in terms of US troops to fight guerrillas but rather of a reassuring presence of US forces in Viet-Nam. These persons undoubtedly feel, however that if war in Viet-Nam continues to move toward overt conventional aggression as opposed to its guerrilla character, combat role for US troops could eventually arise."

(From Saigon 575, October 31, 1961).

This account, of course, strongly supported Taylor's recommendation for a limited U.S. combat presence for psychological reasons. It also suggested that a good many influential Vietnamese had already been apprised of the possibility for troops and had had occasion to express themselves in favor of it as a sign of U.S. commitment. That a U.S. failure to carry through the Taylor recommendation would be noted by such Vietnamese as significant, and could lead to some letdown in morale among them. Nolting had described Tran Van Do as so strongly convinced of the need for U.S. forces that "he did not suggest any condition precedent about political changes by Diem," and this, indeed, seemed to be the tone of the Taylor discussions with Diem and his own recommendations. Nevertheless, the question remained -- in the eyes of the State Department if not of the DOD -- whether U.S. goals in VN could possibly be achieved without both political and administrative changes in Vietnam. If such changes were critical, yet could not be assured, even by using the offer of combat forces as a lever, was it prudent to accept the increased U.S. commitment represented by a combat deployment, in the light of the low probability of overall success? This point was raised in several State cables and in State contributions to the ultimate Joint State-Defense position paper, and it was reflected in the ensuing Presidential letter to Diem. It received one of its clearest formulations in a cable from Secretary Rusk sent from a conference in Japan in anticipation of the proposals likely to be made by the Taylor mission.

"Since Gen Taylor may give first full rpt prior my return, believe special attention should be given to critical question whether Diem prepared take necessary measures to give us something worth supporting. If unwilling trust mil ends to get

job done & take steps to consolidate non-comm elms into serious natl effort, difficult see how handful Am troops can have decisive influence. While attaching greatest possible importance to security SEA, would be reluctant see us make major additional commitment Am prestige to losing horse.

"Suggest Dept carefully review all measures we expect from Diem if our assistance forces us to assume de facto direction SVN affairs."

(USDEL Hakone-State, Secto 6, Nov 1, 1961 /s/ Rusk.)
(This cable not yet available; above summary is from notes).

THE TAYLOR REPORT

After the visits of the Taylor Mission to Vietnam and Thailand, the group retired to Baguio in the Philippines to put together the final report, while General Taylor sent his personal recommendations in final form by cable to the President. The formal report, submitted on November 3, presented a letter of transmittal from General Taylor to the President, a section on "Mission Evaluations and Conclusions," and a set of Appendices that presented the personal recommendations of individual Mission members. (Tab B, listed in the Table of Contents as presenting the personal recommendations of General Taylor, with attachments of draft memoranda to the Heads of Responsible Departments and Agencies, ^{is} not included in the copies of the report available to this study, nor are these recommendations otherwise available, although there is considerable evidence that ^{his recommendation} they conformed closely to the proposals in the cables by General Taylor from Saigon cited earlier.)

Taylor's letter of transmittal described his recommendations as "the emergency program which we feel our Government should implement without delay," and proceeded to draw particular attention to the possible necessity for punitive retaliation against North Vietnam if ^{going beyond these recommendations} Hanoi should continue infiltration and direction and support of the war in the South. (The Appendix by Sterling Cottrell refers to the latter proposal -- "applying graduated punitive measures on the DRV with weapons of our choosing" -- as the "Rostow Plan.")

"While we feel that the program recommended represents those measures which should be taken in our present knowledge of the situation in Southeast Asia, I would not suggest that it is the final word. Future needs beyond this program will depend upon the kind of settlement we obtain in Laos and the manner in which Hanoi decides to adjust its conduct to that settlement. If the Hanoi decision is to continue the irregular war declared on South Vietnam in 1959 with continu-

infiltration and covert support of guerrilla bands in the territory of our ally, we will then have to decide whether to accept as legitimate the continued guidance,

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① training, and support of a guerrilla war across an international boundary, while the attacked react only inside their borders. Can we admit the establishment of the common law that the party attacked and his friends are denied the right to strike the source of aggression, after the fact of external aggression is clearly established? It is our view that our government should undertake with the Vietnamese the measures outlined herein, but should then consider and face the broader question beyond.]

① [We cannot refrain from expressing, having seen the situation on the ground, our common sense of outrage at the burden which this kind of aggression imposes on a new country, only seven years old, with a difficult historical heritage to overcome, confronting the inevitable problems of political, social, and economic transition to modernization. It is easy and cheap to destroy such a country whereas it is difficult undisturbed to build a nation coming out of a complex past without carrying the burden of a guerrilla war.

We were similarly struck in Thailand with the injustice of subjecting this promising nation in transition to the heavy military burdens it faces in fulfilling its role in SEATO security planning along with the guerrilla challenge beginning to form up on its northeast frontier.

It is my judgment and that of my colleagues that the United States must decide how it will cope with Krushchev's "wars of liberation" which are really para-wars of guerrilla aggression. This is a new and dangerous Communist technique which bypasses our traditional political and military responses. While the final answer lies beyond the scope of this report, it is clear to me that the time may come in our relations to Southeast Asia when we must declare our intention to attack the source of guerrilla aggression in North Vietnam and impose on the Hanoi Government a price for participating in the current war which is commensurate with the damage being inflicted on its neighbors to the south.

The argument above, foreshadowed in a public opposition by Rostow earlier in 1961, seems to be one of the earliest expositions in internal official policy memoranda of the possible need for direct attacks upon North Vietnam. In a subsequent section, a listing of "Viet Cong weaknesses," drawing contrasts between the current situation and the earlier Indochina war, concludes with the comment: "Finally, the communists now not only have something to gain -- the South -- but a base to risk -- the North -- if war should come."

Despite (somewhat muted) warnings of possible escalation-to-come -- in the form of large-scale U.S. troop commitments and a bombing campaign against the North -- if the proposed policy were followed ("if" Hanoi chose to continue the war, as all expected), Taylor concluded:

"In closing, let me add that our party left Southeast Asia with the sense of having viewed a serious problem but one which is by no means hopeless. We have many assets in this part of the world which, if properly combined and appropriately supported, offer high odds for ultimate success."

The body of the report opened with an exposition of communist strategy:

"COMMUNIST STRATEGY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA"

"At the present time, the Communists are pursuing a clear and systematic strategy in Southeast Asia. It is a strategy of extending Communist power and influence in ways which bypass U.S. nuclear strength, U.S. conventional naval, air, and ground forces, and the conventional strength of indigenous forces in the area. Their strategy is rooted in the fact that international law and practice does not yet recognize the mounting of guerrilla war across borders as aggression justifying counter-attack at the source.

"The strategy is a variant on Mao's classic three-stage offensive. First, a political base for guerrilla war, subversion, and dissidence is established in each country in the area, exploiting its unique vulnerabilities via trained local or introduced cadres. Second, guerrilla war is begun. Third, a maximum effort is made to translate the Communist position achieved on the ground, plus the weakness and cross-purposes in the non-Communist camp, to induce a neutralist interim solution, blocking the U.S. military presence, as with the proposed renunciation by Laos of SEATO protection. Complete Communist take-over, by whatever means may appear feasible, is the evident ultimate objective.

"Mao's third stage -- overt conventional warfare, with guerrillas in an ancillary role -- is apparently now judged too dangerous to pursue, on the grounds that it is likely to trigger U.S. (or SEATO) intervention.

"This modified Mao strategy is actually underway in Laos and South Vietnam. Cambodia, with Sihanouk's anticipatory collaboration, has already adjusted to the likelihood (in his view) that the Communist strategy will succeed. The strategy is clearly foreshadowed in Thailand. The initial bases for such a program have been laid in Malaya, Indonesia, and Burma; but they will probably not be exploited to the full until the South Vietnam struggle is favorably resolved. The Communists undoubtedly believe -- and with good reason -- that if the strategy succeeds in Laos and South Vietnam the enterprise will rapidly gather momentum throughout Southeast Asia.

"This is not the only possible Communist strategy in Southeast Asia. An overt use of Viet-Minh and Chicom divisions is conceivable, although the terrain and logistical structure of Southeast Asia sets a relatively low limit on the scale of conventional engagement in that theater. And it is in the range of possible contingencies that such a direct attack might be backed by some Soviet nuclear power. But current strategy is as described."

"COMMUNIST STRATEGY IN SOUTH VIETNAM

* * *

"The military strategy being pursued is, evidently, to pin down the ARVN on defensive missions; to create a pervasive sense of insecurity and frustration by hit-and-run raids on self-defense corps and militia units, ambushing the reserve forces if possible as they come up to defend; and to dramatize the inability of the GVN to govern or to build, by the assassination of officials and the sabotage of public works."

* * *

"Despite the considerable guerrilla capabilities of the Viet-Cong, Communist strategy now appears, on balance, to aim at an essentially political denouement rather than the total military capture of the country, as in the case of Mao's campaign in China. A maximum effort is under way to increase political disaffection at every level; among the sects, the minority groups, the trade unions, the students, and the intellectuals. Energetic efforts to dramatize the weaknesses of Diem's regime and to induce discouragement about U.S. policy in Laos and Southeast Asia generally are being pursued. The enemy objective seems to be to produce a political crisis by a combination of military and non-military means out of which would come a South Vietnamese Souvanna Phouma, willing to contemplate unification on terms acceptable to Hanoi, including disengagement from the U.S."

It is remarkable that intelligent men who wrote this analysis, cannot understand that the answer cannot be essentially military.

In describing "The Crisis in South~~west~~ Vietnam," that
it had given rise to the sending of the Taylor Mission and to its
recommendations, the body of the report gave first place (as had
the earlier Taylor cables) to the uncertainties aroused by U.S. policy
in Laos. It went on ^{to} the present a causal picture of the inter-
dependent elements ~~and~~ that had worked to bring Vietnamese society
to the very ^{of} breakdown in the face of the Communist threat:

"THE CRISIS IN SOUTH VIETNAM"

"It is perfectly evident that South Vietnam is now undergoing an acute crisis of confidence, stretching from the top to the bottom of the country. The principal elements involved in this crisis are clear enough:

"1. Uncertainty about the seriousness of the American commitment to defend South Vietnam induced by the Laos negotiation. Many believe that the U.S. will be prepared to settle for a Souvanna in Saigon.

"2. The September successes of the Viet-Cong, indicating an enemy capability of outstripping the build-up of ARVN capabilities. (It should be recalled that the infiltration of one guerrilla imposes the burden of increasing GVN forces by, perhaps, fifteen men to stay even.) The military frustration of the past two months has, in turn, made acute, throughout the administration, a dissatisfaction with Diem's method of rule, with his lack of identification with his people, and with his strategy which has been endemic for some years.

"3. The flood, imposing a heavy economic and administrative burden on an already strained government and society.

"Beneath the surface of this immediate crisis are two vicious circles which have been operating for many months in South Vietnam and which the improvement in atmosphere in the months preceding September tended only superficially to conceal.

"The first vicious circle is military. The lack of firm and well organized operational intelligence has helped produce a defensive disposition of forces to guard against Viet-Cong attack-- a stance perhaps inherited to some degree from the French and not effectively corrected by subsequent U.S. training. This defensive stance has drawn 80 to 85 per cent of the ARVN, including the bulk of the specially trained Ranger Force, into essentially static tasks. Thus, initiative has been conceded to the enemy.

"This, in turn, has made worse a bad system of civil-military relations. The bulk of the military forces remain in control of the Province Chiefs because it is their responsibility to protect the population and installations of their areas; a defensive strategy thus automatically puts the bulk of the military in their hands. When enemy attacks take place, forces are brought up from reserve too slowly to be effective, due to a lack of effective command and control, communications, and mobility

"A very high proportion of ARVN casualties (perhaps 90 per cent) results from ambushes which drive directly, in turn, from these operational characteristics. The consequent inability effectively to protect the people leads, in turn, to a drying up of the basic sources of intelligence and limits the government's ability to raise recruits.

"Thus, poor intelligence, poor command and control arrangements, and poor mobility reinforce each other, leading to a defensive military disposition of resources and a progressive deterioration in the military position of the ARVN.

"The second vicious circle, interwoven with the first, is political. As is widely understood, Diem's instinctive administrative style is that of an old fashioned Asian ruler, seeking to maintain all the strings of power in his own hands, while fragmenting power beneath him. The inability to mobilize intelligence effectively for operational purposes directly flows from this fact, as do the generally poor relations between the Province Chiefs and the military commanders, the former being Diem's reliable agents, the latter a power base he fears. The consequent frustration of Diem's military commanders -- a frustration well known to Diem and heightened by the November 1960 coup -- leads him to actions which further complicate his problem; e.g., his unwillingness to delegate military operations clearly to his generals.

"Beyond the military circle, Diem's operating style and the personal political insecurity it has generated leads him to mistrust excessively many intellectuals and others of the younger generation who are badly needed to give his administration vitality and contact with the people. Many of these men and women are profoundly anti-Communist and capable of constructive use in the national effort; but, on the sidelines (or frustrated within the administration), they spend their efforts in complaints against the regime, while their country sinks towards a Communist takeover they do not want."

Delegation or decentralization would not solve the problem - It is striking how much the weaknesses of the Vietnamese officers which were so evident to the Vietnamese did not become apparent to the US until 63-64

A list of Vietnamese assets, which included Diem himself, who "with all his weaknesses" was a man of "extraordinary ability, stubbornness and guts" ^{who had} and "with the respect of the armed forces" and administration despite their "somewhat half-hearted" "grumbling (and perhaps some plotting)", plus large armed forces and a resilient ^{The list} economy, concluded:

"Despite the intellectuals who sit on the side lines and complain; despite serious dissidence among the Montagnards, the sects, and certain old Viet Minh areas; despite the apathy and fear of the Viet-Cong in the countryside, the atmosphere in South Vietnam is, on balance, one of frustrated energy rather than passive acceptance of inevitable defeat.

"It cannot be emphasized too strongly, however, that time has nearly run out for converting these assets into the bases for victory. Diem himself--and all concerned with the fate of the country--are looking to American guidance and aid to achieve a turning point in Vietnam's affairs. From all quarters in Southeast Asia the message on Vietnam is the same: vigorous American action is needed to buy time for Vietnam to mobilize and organize its real assets; but the time for such a turn around has nearly run out. And if Vietnam goes, it will be exceedingly difficult if not impossible to hold Southeast Asia. What will be lost is not merely a crucial piece of real estate, but the faith that the U.S. has the will and the capacity to deal with the Communist offensive in that area."

(Taylor Report, p. 8, Tab C)

*French, the Diem Regime
from 1946 to this time!*

The report proceeded to present "a strategy for turning the tide and for assuming the offensive in Vietnam," of which the first four elements were the essential ones:

"A STRATEGY FOR TURNING THE TIDE AND FOR ASSUMING THE OFFENSIVE
IN VIETNAM."

"The elements required for buying time and assuming the offensive in Vietnam are, in the view of this mission, the following:

"1. A quick U.S. response to the present crisis which would demonstrate by deeds -- not merely words -- the American commitment seriously to help save Vietnam rather than to disengage in the most convenient manner possible. To be persuasive this commitment must include the sending to Vietnam of some U.S. military forces.

"2. A shift in the American relation to the Vietnamese effort from advice to limited partnership. The present character and scale of the war in South Vietnam decree that only the Vietnamese can defeat the Viet-Cong; but at all levels Americans must, as friends and partners -- not as arms-length advisors -- show them how the job might be done -- not tell them or do it for them.

"3. Through this working association at all levels, the U.S. must bring about de facto changes in Diem's method of administration and seek to bring all elements of the Vietnamese Government closer to the Vietnamese people -- thus helping break the vicious political circle.

"4. By concurrent actions in the fields of intelligence, command and control, mobility, and training, the U.S. must bring about a situation where an effective reserve is mobilized and brought to bear offensively on clearly established and productive offensive targets -- thus helping break the vicious military circle."

* * *

*How?
This remains the
main question 3 years
after U.S. involvement
and began after this
report.*

Taking these elements in turn, the first referred to the critical psychological need in the short run, for evidence of the U.S. commitment in the indispensable form of ground troops (specifically Taylor's proposal for a task force, possibly related to the current flood conditions, of some 8,000 men):

"A QUICK LIFT"

"It is evident that morale in Vietnam will rapidly crumble--and in Southeast Asia only slightly less quickly--if the sequence of expectations set in motion by Vice President Johnson's visit and climaxed by General Taylor's mission are not soon followed by a hard U.S. commitment to the ground in Vietnam."

(Taylor Report, Tab C, p. 10)

The schedule envisioned by the report called for Presidential decision within the coming week of November 5th, by discussions with Diem and other allies in the following week, and "movement of first U.S. units to Vietnam (preferably flood task force, helicopters, Jungle Jim)" in the week of November 19th, along with publication of sanitized Presidential letters, and the Jordan Report, and Presidential presentation of US case to UN.

"...A special session of Congress to receive a presidential message and to pass a resolution of support might be considered as one method for preparing to implement the suggested program. A quiet message to the U.S.S.R. should be dispatched indicating that we propose to help defend South Vietnam and urging Moscow to use its influence with Ho Chi Minh to call his dogs off, mind his business, and feed his people."

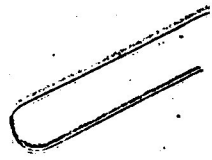
(Ibid., p. 11)

"There would be considerable advantage in shortening the time table."

"Included in the sequence above should be a review of contingency plans, designed to back the initial steps; a general review of plans with respect to Southeast Asia in relation to Berlin; and decision as to whether further call-up of U.S. reserves is required to provide ready forces up to the nuclear threshold for Southeast Asia as well as for Berlin."

(Ibid., p. 11)

Not needed, If would have required a few more divisions in 1961, to change the course of the war
As for Vietnamese confidence, and active participation, short of efforts to create a popular government, there is no solution



The next point concerned the necessity for a changed relationship by the USG and the GVN in meeting the threat to joint interests in SVN, a shift in role and responsibility for the U.S. toward "limited partnership" in the decision-making and operations of the GVN.

how many americans?

"Perhaps the most striking aspect of this mission's effort is the unanimity of view -- individually arrived at by the specialists involved -- that what is now required is a shift from U.S. advice to limited partnership and working collaboration with the Vietnamese. The present war cannot be won by direct U.S. action; it must be won by the Vietnamese. But there is a general conviction among us that the Vietnamese performance in every domain can be substantially improved if Americans are prepared to work side by side with the Vietnamese on the key problems. Moreover, there is evidence that Diem is, in principle, prepared for this step, and that most -- not all -- elements in his establishment are eagerly awaiting it."

(Ibid., p. 11)

"Following are the specific categories where the introduction of U.S. working advisors or working military units are suggested in the appendices -- an asterisk indicating where such operations are, to some degree, under way.

"-- A high level government advisor or advisors. General Lansdale has been requested by Diem; and it may be wise to envisage a limited number of Americans -- acceptable to Diem as well as to us -- in key ministries....

"-- A Joint U.S.-Vietnamese Military Survey, down to the provincial level, in each of three corps areas, to make recommendations with respect to intelligence, command and control, more economical and effective passive defense, the build-up of a reserve for offensive purposes, military-province-chief relations, etc....

"-- Joint planning of offensive operations, including Border Control Operations....

"-- Intimate liaison with the Vietnamese Central Intelligence organizations (C.I.O.); with each of the seven intelligence services; and with the intelligence collection process at the provincial level....

(Ibid. p. 13, Sub 1)

-- Jungle Jim. ~~(Appendix A.)~~

-- Counter infiltration operations in Laos. ~~(Appendix F.)~~

-- Increased covert offensive operations in North as well as in Laos and South Vietnam. ~~(Appendix F.)~~

-- The introduction, under MAAG operational control, of three helicopter squadrons -- one for each corps area -- and the provision of more light aircraft, as the need may be established. ~~(Appendix A.)~~

-- A radical increase in U.S. trainers at every level from the staff colleges, where teachers are short -- to the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps, where a sharp expansion in competence may prove the key to mobilizing a reserve for offensive operations. ~~(Appendices A and E.)~~

-- The introduction of engineering and logistical elements within the proposed U.S. military task force to work in the flood area within the Vietnamese plan, on both emergency and longer term reconstruction tasks. ~~(Appendix A.)~~

-- A radical increase in U.S. special force teams in Vietnam: to work with the Vietnamese Ranger Force proposed for the border area ~~(Appendix F.)~~; to assist in unit training, including training of. Clandestine Action Service. ~~(Appendices A and F.)~~

-- Increase in MAAG support for the Vietnamese Navy. ~~(Appendix A.)~~

-- Introduction of U.S. Naval and/or Coast Guard personnel to assist in coastal and river surveillance and control, until Vietnamese naval capabilities can be improved. ~~(Appendix A.)~~

-- Reconsideration of the role of air power, leading to more effective utilization of assets now available, including release from political control of the 14 D-6 aircraft, institution of close-support techniques, and better employment of available weapons. ~~(Appendix A-V.)~~

To execute this program of limited partnership requires a change in the charter, the spirit, and the organization of the MAAG in South Vietnam. It must be shifted from an advisory group to something nearer -- but not quite -- an operational headquarters in a theater of war. ~~The~~

TOP SECRET

The third essential involved changes in Diem's methods of administration. (The proposal adopted conforms to that suggested in Sterling Cottrell's appendix; it also appears as the recommended initial phase in proposals by William Jordan in his appended comments in the report, although Jordan went on to propose more radical measures, reducing Diem's authority, if these advisory and lower-level efforts should fail. Both of these are discussed below.)

"REFORMING DIEM'S ADMINISTRATIVE METHOD"

"The famous problem of Diem as an administrator and politician could be resolved in a number of ways:

-- By his removal in favor of a military dictatorship which would give dominance to the military chain of command.

-- By his removal in favor of a figure of more dilute power (e.g., Vice President Nguyen Ngoc Tho) who would delegate authority to act to both military and civil leaders.

-- By bringing about a series of de facto administrative changes via persuasion at high levels; collaboration with Diem's aides who want improved administration; and by a U.S. operating presence at many working levels, using the U.S. presence (e.g., control over the helicopter squadrons) to force the Vietnamese to get their house in order in one area after another.

"We have opted for the third choice, on the basis of both merit and feasibility.

"Our reasons are these: First, it would be dangerous for us to engineer a coup under present tense circumstances, since it is by no means certain that we could control its consequences and potentialities for Communist exploitation. Second, we are convinced that a part of the complaint about Diem's administrative methods conceals a lack of first-rate executives who can get things done. In the endless debate between Diem and his subordinates (Diem complaining of limited executive material; his subordinates, of Diem's bottleneck methods both have hold of a piece of the truth.

"The proposed strategy of limited partnership is designed both to force clear delegation of authority in key areas and to beef up Vietnamese administration until they can surface and develop the men to take over.

"This is a difficult course to adopt. We can anticipate some friction and reluctance until it is proved that Americans can be helpful partners and that the techniques will not undermine Diem's political position. Shifts in U.S. attitudes and methods of administration as well as Vietnamese are required. But we are confident that it is the right way to proceed at this stage; and, as noted earlier, there is reason for confidence if the right men are sent to do the right jobs."

The combination of No 2 and No 3 could have succeeded. First get control of the low level then force the change on Diem. And who among the Americans would have been able to beat Nhu at this game? On the whole solution No 3 is unrealistic considering the American temper, American bureaucracy, American machine. The British might have succeeded in such attempt.

-- By increasing Diem's sense of security and by tactful persuasion attempt to bring his government closer to the trade unions, students, sects, intellectuals, and villagers. The improvement of the Province Chiefs and their guidance in new directions is an essential part of this process. ~~(Appendix G.)~~

Complete
revision
on Diem 1958

-- By using U. S. civil affairs teams in key areas, to demonstrate how more effective approaches to the villagers can be made. ~~(Appendix G.)~~

-- To strengthen the ARVN Civic Action Program and improving its effectiveness. ~~(Appendix G.)~~

Although these -- and other measures - should be attempted, our basic policy must be to diminish the tension arising between the government and the people stemming from the security situation. The record shows that the disintegration of the political situation in South Vietnam since 1959 is primarily due to the government's inability to protect its citizens and to conduct the war effectively.

The tensions and
the deterioration of
Security
It became

(Lund, pp. 15, 16)

more open, after the communist
subversion, because the people feared Diem's
repressive system.

With respect to the proposed expansion of the Vietnam regular forces ^{proposed by Diem,} beyond the present approved level of 200,000:

"~~REMARK~~....Until the basic problems of intelligence, command and control, and mobility are on their way to solution, a mere expansion in the army will be of little help. Under present circumstances, the Viet-Cong could pin down a much larger army than Saigon now commands. But to cover the transitional period, the expansion to 200,000 is necessary."

(Ibid., p. 20).

The report summed up the foregoing proposals with an emphasis on offensive military action (which, expressing General Taylor's judgment of the critical requirements of the situation, was later to be seen in some contrast to the emphasis of R.K.G. Thompson and others on a ^{the} "pacification" process, stressing ~~the~~ protection of the villagers and their isolation from the guerrillas, as embodied in the strategic hamlet program: an approach that could be regarded as emphasis ^{and} on a elaboration of the ^{on} 4th ^{point} Point listed by Taylor below:

"TAKING THE OFFENSIVE

"The object of these proposals, as a whole, is, of course, to permit the ARVN to assume an effective offensive against the Viet-Cong. An offensive campaign in Vietnam involves a number of different elements:

"--The widespread development of an offensive initiative at the local level.

"--The development of an offensive against infiltration and infiltrators in the plateau area via the Frontier Ranger Force ...and the Clandestine Action Service....

"-- The liquidation of Zone D; the Viet-Cong redoubt on the boundary between I and II Corps; the training areas near the Cambodian frontier, etc.

"--The systematic clearing of the Viet-Cong from less firmly held areas; and, above all, learning how to hold an area by a mixture of military and civil measures once it has been swept."

(Ibid., pp. 20 & 21)

One prerequisite for an offensive strategy by the ARVN. Change the implied system of evaluation of performance of officers: up to the present based mainly on ability to avoid losses.

Comments followed on the needs of the Navy, Research and Development, economic support, and the flood. The latter problem was described in terms that were ~~as~~ in later years sometimes used in describing the "opportunity" offered to the GVN by the large-scale refugee flows.

"The present flood is a disaster, enveloping two provinces and substantial portions of two others; but it is, at the same time, a major opportunity for the Vietnamese and for the joint U.S.-Vietnam partnership which this report proposes.

"In general it offers to the GVN a chance to mobilize all anti-communist elements in a common constructive national effort."

"....This effort offers to the Vietnamese government an opportunity to get closer to the people in the villages in an important southern area and to see if it cannot reconstruct the area with military and civil arrangements which prevent the re-entry on a large scale of the Viet-Cong. In a sense the flood is a sweep; and the problem is to consolidate after the sweep."

But it was also an opportunity for the U.S.:

"For the United States it offers an opportunity to introduce limited but still meaningful military forces to assist in the emergency and reconstruction effort, making available within the country for further use precisely the types of engineering forces which the logistics part of Appendix A recommends."

"The presence of American military forces in the area should also give us an opportunity to work intensively with the civil guards and with other local military elements and to explore the possibility of suffusing them with an offensive spirit and tactics.

"The introduction in this area of substantial American forces raises, of course, the problem of their protection. The precise nature of the risks run can only be assessed on the spot by the local U.S. commander. It is evident that a certain risk will be run of daytime sniping and ambush and of night raids. With intensive cooperation with the local military and militia and certain elementary precautions, these risks appear capable of control. The precise techniques for dealing with these risks must rest with the Task Force Commander; but he should be supplied with units and other resources required to do the job.

"Although further staff work will be required to assess the size and composition of an appropriate U.S. flood construction force, we would now envisage a unit of perhaps 8000 men."

(p. 24)

With the arrogant style of the Diem's Administration's reaction to the main problem is to avoid further alienation of the people while helping them -

No/ enough, such a... dedicated men in the leadership of the CIO, there will be no substantial progress.

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Next, the report summarized recommendations contained in the Appendices with respect to the questions of intelligence, command and control, mobility and training: "The technical areas ^{where} GVN improvement must be achieved if the successful offensive is to be launched." These included: assigning "clear national responsibility for intelligence collection and evaluation to the Central Intelligence organization" (A problem that the creation of the CIO, ^{after} ~~at the expense of~~ much U.S. urging in the spring of 1961, had not solved: and was not ^{about} able to solve, to this day); improving working relations between ^{pro}vince chiefs and Army commanders on a case-by-case basis; introducing U.S. helicopter units; building up the Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps "so that the army can be progressively released for offensive actions." On the latter point, relating to the need for reserves:

"In addition to measures taken by the Vietnamese to improve their reserve position, it is an evident requirement that the United States review quick action contingency plans to move into Vietnam, should the scale of the Vietnam offensive radically increase at a time when Vietnamese reserves are inadequate to cope with it. Such action might be designed to take over responsibility of the security of certain relatively quiet areas, if the battle remained at the guerrilla level, or to fight the Communists if open war were attempted."

(Ibid., p 19)

On training, the report concluded:

"It is our clear impression (Appendix A) that, by and large, training and equipment of the Vietnamese armed forces are still too heavily weighted toward conventional military operations. There has undoubtedly been a shift towards guerrilla and counter-guerrilla training, but it has not gone far enough. Even the Rangers are not adequately trained or equipped for sustained jungle warfare...."

(Ibid., p. 19)

(unsigned, but prepared by the military members of the Taylor Mission) emphasized the prime necessity for a U.S. force commitment in Laos to safeguard US interests in SEA and specifically in South Vietnam, as had the JCS in their analysis of October 10th, cited earlier. From this point of view, the commitment of U.S. forces to South Vietnam alone appeared (as in JCS memos) distinctly a "second-best" alternative, though its essentiality as a minimally acceptable course of action was still further underlined if South Vietnam were to be saved; and the initial commitment of limited forces envisioned in Taylor's recommendations was ~~xxx~~ seen as almost surely to be followed by the necessity for much larger forces.

cc
Taylor Rpt.
(Int'l,
Sec I,
General
Statement)

(burn 4)

The body of the report concluded with a mention of some contingencies raised by the proposed policy:

"CONTINGENCIES

"The U.S. action proposed in this report -- involving as it does the overt lifting of the MAAG ceiling, substantial encadrement and the introduction of limited U.S. forces -- requires that the United States also prepare for contingencies that might arise from the enemy's reaction. The initiative proposed here should not be undertaken unless we are prepared to deal with any escalation the communists might choose to impose. Specifically, we must be prepared to act swiftly under these three circumstances: an attempt to seize and to hold the Pleiku-Kontum area; a political crisis in which the communists might attempt to use their forces around Saigon to capture the city in the midst of local confusion; and undertaking of overt major hostilities by North Vietnam."

(pp. 24-25)

The appendices which followed were described as expressing the views of the respective authors:

(sic) "....They have contributed substantially to the conclusions expressed in the two preceding papers and, evidently, reflect a broad consensus; but no effort was made to adjust the various perspectives represented in the several sections of the Report."

(Tab D, first unnumbered page).

They serve in part to spell out reasoning underlying the recommendations in the body of the report; yet, equally, they reveal some strong divergencies from the ^{findings on} analysis of essentials and from the proposals in the body of the report. Ultimately, the policy that resulted from the Presidential decisions could be ~~re~~ described as omitting virtually everyone of the prerequisites described by one or another U.S. agency or principal Presidential advisor as essential to the success of US/GVN undertakings in Vietnam. But the same could be said with respect to the Taylor Mission report, in relation to the views expressed in its individual appendices. Thus, the "Military Appendix"

If intervention were "impossible for non-military reasons," the military committee suggested ways in which the combat effectiveness of RVNAF could be increased substantially, but promised only the hope that these would "upset the communist timetable and prevent a rapid takeover in South Vietnam by communist forces" (underlining added).

The military committee proceeded to make a number of comments on the shortcomings of RVNAF that applied not only to the situation then prevailing, but were to recur in advisor comments repeatedly over the next six years:

find

"Based on their limited observations in the field, in general members of the military committee found the fighting capabilities of the RVNAF to be significantly less than their previous estimates which were based on reports, and that the shortcomings which degraded their former opinions on the subject can be attributed largely to the failure of the GVN to make effective use of its resources. A state of apathy seems to pervade all levels observed in the RVNAF. It appeared as though SVN forces are in a state of suspended animation except when reacting with limited effort against threats to static posts or to the civilian populace. They seem to consider the VC to be "will o' the wisps" and that efforts to find, fix and kill them are doomed to futility."

*Anglo
Rpt
Sub
Part II
RVNAF*

"One of the most glaring deficiencies that strikes the observer is the apparent lack of enthusiasm and dedication for their cause on the part of officers and men in the RVNAF. Based on several discussions on this subject with unit advisors and impressions received from discussion of operational matters with Vietnamese officers, there appears to be no driving determination to find, fix and kill the VC. On the other hand, it is generally conceded that the VC are completely indoctrinated in their purpose and will undergo privations, personal hardships and anything required to defeat the SVN. There is an urgent requirement, in the opinion of the military committee, for special and continuing emphasis by SVN on its troop indoctrination program driving home the evils of communism and the objectives of the VC and the communist objectives to destroy SVN as an independent nation...."

*Sub
Part III
ARVN*

"Artillery support during operations is often applied with unobserved artillery fire. Due to a shortage of 1:25,000 maps, 1:100,000 maps are often used. Observation aircraft are located at ARVN and Corps level and are not immediately available to Divisions.

"~~There~~ There is widespread tendency to halt operations at night and retire into static posts. Patrol ~~static~~ activity is not taken seriously enough and is not of the scale or degree of vigor required."

battalions and lasting for 30 days never saw a single V.C. Its results were destruction of 16 empty huts and a small rice supply."

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"The ordinary soldier gets little personal attention from his superiors. His pay is woefully low, promotion opportunities few, leave is almost a myth, little if any provision is made for his dependents and the adequacy of his diet is questionable. It is small wonder that his morale is low and he finds it difficult to whip up an aggressive spirit."

Appendix B, a memorandum for General Taylor, dated 27 October 1961 from Sterling Cottrell presented the views on political and administrative problems ~~of the Head of the~~ Director of the Vietnam Task Force. Although it proposed accepting Diem's continued ^{authority} role, and attempting to influence the workings of the GVN "from the bottom up" -- both approaches adopted in the official recommendations of the Taylor Mission -- there is a clear indication in the Cottrell memo that these approaches might not work adequately, and Cottrell drew the conclusion that the U.S. should avoid committing itself unduly to success against the communists in South Vietnam: a view of the ^{stakes} status for the U.S. in South Vietnam, and of desirable (and feasible) U.S. policy, dramatically differ^{ent} from that urged by the DOD. Thus, Cottrell was led to oppose ^{the} Taylor-recommended deployment of a U.S. task force, with the commitment it implied; although Cottrell's willingness to see the "Rostow Plan" employed, if necessary to reverse the trend, seems somewhat at odds with the preceding judgments.

Learn Secret 3

27 October 1961

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MEMORANDUM FOR GENERAL TAYLOR

FROM: STERLING COTTRELL

SUBJECT: VIETNAM

RECOMMENDATIONS.

1. The Diem regime is not organized nor operated sufficiently well to meet the Communist threat successfully. A new response must be developed.

2. Given the virtual impossibility of changing perceptibly the basic weaknesses of Ngo Dinh Diem, and in view of our past unsuccessful efforts to reform the GVN from the top down, we should now direct our major efforts from the bottom up, and supply all effective kinds of military and economic aid.

3. Since it is an open question whether the GVN can succeed even with U. S. assistance, it would be a mistake for the U. S. to commit itself irrevocably to the defeat of the Communists in SVN.

4. Since U. S. combat troops of division size cannot be employed effectively, they should not be introduced at this stage, despite the short range favorable psychological lift it would give the GVN.

5. U. S. combat forces of CINCPAC's command should be maintained in their present state of readiness for employment in SVN if the present guerrilla war evolves into a conventional type operation.

6. The world should continue to be impressed that this situation of overt DRV aggression, below the level of conventional warfare, and must be stopped in the best interest of every free nation.

7. If the combined U. S.-GVN efforts are insufficient to reverse the trend, we should then move to the "Rostow Plan" of applying graduated punitive measures on the DRV with weapons of our choosing.

SECRET

the chances were good that application of U. S. military force could solve the problem, then responsibility and control might be desirable. But it is not, so U. S. control should not be sought.

APPROACHES.

The ways we can assist the GVN successfully are governed by certain characteristics of the Diem regime, which must be recognized so long as the Diem remains in power.

1. Diem, like Sukarno, Rhee, and Chiang is cast in the mold of an oriental despot, and cannot be "brought around" by threats, or insistence on adoption of purely Western concepts. To be successful, the approaches must be made on the plane of advisors, not as adversaries, with emphasis on Diem's primary responsibility and control.

2. Diem, having been subject to military coups, cannot be expected to delegate concentrated authority to the military. Ways must be found to solve the military problem without insistence on full delegation, no matter how desirable or necessary delegation may be.

3. Diem is not a planner, in the Western sense. He avoids elaborate paper plans. Speculation on the reasons are many, but the fact remains. Therefore, the U. S. should not insist on national plans as a prerequisite to any assistance. Military plans might be forthcoming, albeit painfully, from military sources.

4. Diem is not a good administrator, in the Western sense. In the oriental despotic tradition, he rules everything from his own desk. Suggestions for radically changing this pattern run contrary to Diem's basic nature and can be suggested, but should not be set forth as the conditions of U. S. assistance.

5. Our history of dealing with Diem makes it quite clear that a time lag must be anticipated between Diem's acceptance of a foreign proposal, and his fulfillment, if the action depends solely upon the GVN. In the present situation, time is of the essence, and fast action is required on many fronts, but GVN action is always slow and many times incomplete.

ANSWERS TO CERTAIN POLITICAL QUESTIONS.

From 1954 to 1959 I tried to promote the idea of a policy planning board.

3. In this course I progressively realized that:

- Diem did not want it because he felt he had to surrender part of his power of decision.
- Nhu was first attracted by the idea but realized soon that in order to serve some useful purpose, this body will have to be staffed by men hard to control.

SECRET
The Cabinet and the high echelon of civil service fear for Vice President Tho's office because they fear they would lose face by not rising up to the standards of policy formulation.

Diem is a Confucian leader, aware of the limitations of his intellectual capabilities. He explains both his complex of inferiority to Nhu, the "intellectual" of the family and his attitude towards any "elaborate" papers.

limitations on his Sovereign power of decision

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"....Since Diem insists on authority being retained by the Provincial Chiefs, why don't we try to turn this necessity of dealing with them into a ~~v~~ virtue, and help these officers do a better job? To my mind, this flows logically from a conviction expressed previously that the battle will be won or lost primarily at the village level. So let's all get down on our bellies to fight the problem from the bottom up rather than entire concentration from the top on down. For years we have been trying unsuccessfully to ~~and~~ 'reform' the system at the top, while virtually ignoring the 'rice roots'...."

(p.p. 5 & 6, Cottrell Memo for Gen Taylor)

"GENERAL LANSDALE AS ADVISOR TO DIEM.

"I heartily endorse this idea. Earlier in this paper I pointed out the limitations we face in 'reforming' Diem. Any asset we can use to influence him should be applied. The fact that Diem has asked for his services is an ideal entree. Because of the confidence Diem has in Lansdale, some progress might be registered k from the top down."

(p. 7, Ibid.)

Appendix C, a memo for General Taylor of 30 October 1961 by William J. Jorden, on "The Political Situation in South Vietnam" differed radically in tone from other appendices and from the body of the report and Taylor's cables, both in emphasis on political problems and their urgency, and the ultimate policy suggested with respect to Diem.

It began:

"Pressures for political and administrative change in South Viet Nam have reached the explosion point. Without some badly needed reforms, it is unlikely that any program of assistance to that country can be fully effective."

(p. 1)

"*from pp 2 & 3, Sent 38.*

38
peacefully and with U.S. encouragement. There are many who believe, in fact, that it can come peacefully only if it is urged by the U.S. Government. If change does not come in an orderly way, it will almost certainly come through forceful means carried out by an alliance of political and military elements."

Like Cottrell's discussion (from which it differed ^{sharply} radically in tone) the above analysis was clearly skeptical of the possibility of changing Diem's methods; yet, Jorden did not draw the conclusion that the U.S. could afford to limit its commitment and involvement in the face of likely inadequacy of Diem's policy.

"The United States would face a serious dilemma should violence erupt. Given the large and growing U.S. involvement in Viet Nam, we would almost certainly have to intervene directly...."

Remarkably clear sighted.
"These are dangers, too, in the continuation of the present uneasy situation. It means appalling waste in terms of energy, ability, and patriotism. The prevailing administrative stagnation means that any new program of aid will be less than fully effective. It means, too, that the U.S. becomes increasingly identified with an unpopular and ineffective regime."

Jorden was lead, then, to recommend advisory and persuasive methods similar to those proposed by Cottrell, but only as a first phase, to be followed, if necessary, by U.S. pressures to change Diem's status and ^{drastically} power radically within the Vietnamese Government.

Seen 4/142

The Choices

41 The arguments in favor of change, almost any change, are impressive. The situation in South Viet Nam is far too serious to permit that country the luxury of depriving itself of any of its available skills, intelligence, imagination, and hope. Those committed to helping the Vietnamese in this critical hour have an equal interest in seeing that everything that can contribute to victory is done.

The choices for the U. S. Government in this situation were listed earlier. My judgement of those choices follows:

1. To give unquestioned backing to Diem and to try to frustrate any pressures for change in his method of rule is to court disaster.
2. To stay neutral and hope for the best means an open invitation to an explosion that would probably benefit the Communists more than anyone else.
- 41 3. We are obliged, I think, to encourage in a variety of ways reforms in administration, from the highest level to the villages, that will be acceptable to both the President and his critics.
4. If this kind of compromise approach fails to produce promising results, if reforms are frustrated by backsliding into old ways and attitudes, if the "back door" continues as the preferred way to influence, if criticism produces harassment, then we must consider backing changes that would reduce sharply the role of the President and would alter his status to that of figurehead and symbol.
5. Engineering or backing a coup involves large risks in both the local situation and in the broader framework of world opinion. It is not something we do well. It has little to recommend itself.

Specific Recommendations

- 42 1. (As a matter of general policy, we should avoid identification of President Diem or his regime as the focus of U. S. policy. Our public concern should always be with the people of Viet Nam, with their problems, and their aspirations.)

To help create the conditions for the emergence of a responsible opposition, with a program attractive to the population - Both as a means of pressure on Diem and as an eventual alternative to Diem's leadership -

In a follow-up to Rusks expression of concern from Japan, a State Department query to the Embassy on 4 November 1961 bore out General Taylor's prediction to Diem that there would be great interest in Washington in question of the political steps the Diem regime was willing to take to increase the probability of success. (To Saigon 545, 4 Nov 61).

"There will be highest level discussion here November 7 on VIET NAM. Effectiveness Diem Government will be closely examined. Highest levels request your views prior to meeting on extent to which you believe Diem can be induced to modify and broaden his government if US decides to make substantial additional contribution along lines you discussed with General Taylor.

"Feeling is strong that major changes will be required if joint effort is to be successful in that US cannot be asked further engage its prestige and forces while machinery of Diem government remains inadequate and thus full capabilities South Vietnamese forces and population not being realized.

"For example, delegation of authority to Vietnamese civil and military authorities commensurate with their responsibilities to overcome present GVN paralysis and sense nonparticipation seems mandatory.

"Would appreciate your comments on following possible changes:

"1. Creation of National Emergency Council (pursuant to Diem's declaration National emergency) headed by a person of importance and capability (if possible Vice President Tho) through which all GVN business to and from Diem would be transacted. Nhu would coordinate between Diem and NEC. (Thuan would be Secretary of NEC.) A mature, discreet and hard headed U.S. member would be appointed to participate in all decisions and coordinate with Ambassador. Membership primarily civilian, presumably members present Cabinet.

"2. On military side there would be comparable delegation of authority commensurate with responsibility to be achieved placing all services under Joint General Staff and by intelligence unification.

"If these basic and difficult changes could be achieved, might then be possible make progress on following:

"a) simplify GVN structure and programs

"b) greater role for VP Tho as capable man and constitutional successor.

"c) improved contacts between GVN and Vietnamese people,

Complete ignorance of inner situation in GVN at that time even if this has been adopted, with Nhu and Thuan, Tho would have been completely short circuited and would go on playing the role of his page to the Diem Regime.

including Sects and labor unions.

"a) Other reforms agreed to in CIP but not carried out (refair)

"In addition to foregoing, would appreciate your full comments and suggestions with respect this entire problem."

(To Saigon 545, 4 November 1961).

This query revealed several divergencies in emphasis from the discussions held by the Taylor mission in Saigon and expressed in the Taylor Report of 3 November. There is, for example, no emphasis in the body of that report that major changes along the lines of "broadening" the government were "required" if the joint effort were to be successful, let alone any suggestion that the U.S. might prudently refrain from engaging its prestige and forces further if the Diem government were to remain inadequate. The difference between a National Emergency Council headed by Tho and one headed by Nhu -- as suggested by Thuan to Nolting -- was not, of course, a minor one.

Meanwhile staffs in the Pentagon were working over the suggestions for action contained in the Taylor Report, in addition to Department of Defense staff proposals that had been prepared for the Taylor mission and the CINCPAC proposals made to Taylor. Staff papers in ISA (notes of 2 November and 6 November by Colonel Kent of ISA are available to the study) divided various actions for purposes of consideration according to their effect on the US/GVN position with respect to the Geneva accords, and on the degree to which they increased the involvement of U.S. prestige and resources. Such proposals as improving intelligence organization, joint US-GVN province surveys, a border ranger force to block infiltration, and emphasis on a national emergency in Vietnam, neither affected the Accords nor significantly increased U.S. commitment. An increase in advisors, or

The same if Nhu and Thuan are involved -
In my view without the removal of Thuan, Nhu's influence cannot be undercut -
The role of Tho would have been uplifted only if Thuan is replaced by a strong independent character, such as Nguyen Van Thuan (former member of Planning 14, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100)
Nguyen Van Thuan (former member of Planning 14, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100)
Ex brother in law of Nhu and brother of Thuan

the use of the Jungle Jim unit as in a "training" mission would affect the accords, but could be handled so as to constitute a quiet or covert breach. (ISA estimated that such roles as increasing intelligence advisers, the province surveys, expedited training for the civil guard and self-defense corps, helping to organize a border ranger force, could involve several hundred U.S. military advisers; advisors at battalion level and selected corps would require 200-300 men. The present approved MAAG strength was 1103, with an increase to 1509 requested; the total with the above increases would run 2000-3000. It would be obvious to the DRV and ICC that this increase exceeded the ceiling, but this could not easily be proved and discussions between the ICC and the Embassy could be extended for months during which the value of the augmentation would be realized.) U.S. aircraft, with U.S. crews in supporting or operational missions, either fixed wing or helicopters, would represent an overt breach of the Accords and a significant increase in U.S. involvement. Thus, the ISA draft pointed out that the introduction of several helicopter companies could affect the new Laos Conference in Geneva and might jeopardize the ICC presence, which might still be useful to the U.S.; moreover, casualties were possible, so that groundwork would be needed with Congress and the press. US logistical units would be even more serious on both these counts, followed by (ascending order) U.S. engineer units and U.S. combat units for training. Most significant, both in violating the Accords and in committing U.S. prestige, (though most effective in achieving U.S. interests in Vietnam) would be U.S. combat units as represented by the proposal for a flood relief task force including combat elements. Any combat elements such as in the task force, the ISA/Vietnam desk officer pointed out would come under

under attack and would need to defend itself, committing U.S. prestige deeply. U.S. troops would then be fighting in South Vietnam and could not withdraw under fire. Thus, the introduction of U.S. troops in South Vietnam was a decisive act and must be sent to achieve a comparably decisive mission. This mission would probably require overtime(?) increased numbers of troops; DRV intervention would probably increase until a large number of U.S. troops were required, three or more divisions. (Taylor had used this figure, above, as likely to be required if the troops were sent explicitly for the mission of countering the insurgent threat. He held out hopes that the limited mission of the flood relief task force might allow it to be withdrawn shortly, if decided, or at least held down in size; he presented this as an advantage of the flood relief rationale for the introduction of combat elements over that of the "Concept for Intervention in Vietnam," with its somewhat larger force. However, Taylor did not clearly address the question of whether the task force could easily be withdrawn, or the U.S. refrain from reinforcing it substantially, if it should come under attack by the Viet Cong or if it should trigger or be followed by a major increase in infiltration from the DRV.) The ISA paper estimated that the Bloc would not commit North Vietnamese or Chinese Communist forces to large scale overt military attack, but would step up covert infiltration that could tie down large numbers of U.S. and Vietnamese forces. An additional 15,000 North Vietnamese troops would have serious effects. This covert intervention could thus require three or more U.S. divisions and lead to a "war of attrition." Since the U.S. could not commit troops, then gracefully withdraw, issues(?) involving U.S. forces should not be undertaken unless the U.S. were willing to fight for SEA with major forces "on the

order of the Korean War" with the mission of suppressing the insurgency in South Vietnam. The commitment, the staff papers concluded, should be taken, but not with the intention of withdrawing under pressure, and pressure was probably. (This analysis was closely similar in form and content to the memorandum addressed by McNamara to the President a few days later) (see below), but it differed, at least in explicitness, on one point. The latter memo, and most official JCS discussions on this subject, related the possible need for major U.S. reinforcement to the contingency of North Vietnamese and Chinese Communist overt intervention in the form of invasion; in this context, it is believed that logistical problems for the communists and the capabilities of air interdiction against largely road bound troops, would limit the required U.S. forces to some six divisions, or 200,000 men, in addition to South Vietnamese and SEATO help in the face of a maximum overt effort by the communists. The possibility of large-scale covert infiltration of regular units, as occurred in 1965-1967, was never mentioned either in NIE's or JCS analyses in the early 1960's. Moreover, this ISA estimate of three or more U.S. divisions needed to deal with the increase in covert infiltration by the DRV is unusually explicit in relating the problem of increased infiltration to a requirement for U.S. ground forces (as distinct from the possibility of threatening or carrying out air attacks upon North Vietnam to deter such increased infiltration.)

A document in the Secretary of Defense files for November, with the title "Questions Arising from the Proposed Program for South Vietnam," lists eleven questions accompanied by "Answers Proposed by General Taylor" is partly indicative of the emphasis put by General Taylor (paralleled by the emphasis in the 8 November memo from the Secretary of Defense to the

President, reflecting the views of Secretary McNamara, Deputy Secretary Gilpatrick and the JCS) on the critical role of the U.S. task force including combat elements, among the larger set of actions proposed by the Taylor mission, in preserving the situation in South Vietnam.

"Question 1. What is the overall US objective in South Vietnam?

"Answer. 'To avoid a further deterioration in the situation in South Vietnam and eventually to contain and eliminate the threat to its independence.' (Quotation from President's letter of October 13, 1961)

"Question 2. What does the proposed program undertake to accomplish?

"Answer: a. To restore national confidence in South Vietnam and to demonstrate the seriousness of US intentions to friends and foes in Southeast Asia.

b. To insure an improved use of the resources presently available to South Vietnam.

c. To help the SVN government over the present economic and social crisis resulting from a flood.

d. To fill the military gap during the time necessary to increase the strength of the SVN Armed Forces and to improve the Civil Guard.

e. To use this crisis to obtain concessions from Diem necessary for the long-term stability of the country.

"Question 3. Will this program 'avoid a further deterioration of the situation in South Vietnam'?

"Answer: Yes, if executed promptly.

"Question 4. Will this program, less the proposed US Task Force, 'avoid a further deterioration of the situation in South Vietnam'?

"Answer: Very doubtful. There is no convincing substitute for US military presence to raise local morale and to affirm the seriousness of our intent.

"Question 5. Will this program 'eventually contain and eliminate the threat to the independence of South Vietnam'?

"Answer: It is an important initial step in that direction, but does not in itself assure the final victory. Much will depend on the settlement in Laos and the subsequent behavior of the authorities in North Vietnam. To obtain the final victory the US may have to strike the source of the aggression. This decision, however, does not need to be taken now as the proposed program is justified whether or not we must eventually expand the war.

*Only buy time
and delay the
communist from
further advance*

"Question 6. If this program is initiated should it be accompanied by some public commitment such as that undertaken for Berlin?

"Answer. No. Governments often live to regret public commitments. Our intent can best be established by deeds accompanied, perhaps, by a private communication to North Vietnam.

"Question 7. How should the Jordan report be used?

"Answer. It should be published prior to the initiation of this program in a context to be determined by State.

"Question 8. Should the introduction of U.S. forces be linked to flood relief?

"Answer. It depends upon the political estimate of the advantage of this course of action. In favor of it are the points that the existence of the flood crisis gives the U.S. a clear humanitarian reason for the timing of the introduction of our forces. Once in place, these forces will have a visibly useful employment in the flood area and a good reason for not engaging in chasing guerrillas in the jungle. Finally, the termination of flood conditions might be used as a reason for the withdrawal of our forces. On the other hand, the psychological effect of the introduction of our forces will be greater if their introduction is justified primarily by the military situation. The use of the flood situation may suggest a gimmick or a cover plan.

"Question 9. If we introduce U.S. forces how can we extract them?

"Answer. We can take them out after obtaining a quick victory, which, however, is highly unlikely. Otherwise we can take them out after having build up the local situation to the point that our forces are no longer needed. For planning purposes this time may be set at the end of 1962 by which time Diem will have increased his army to 200,000 men, will have had time to train his Civil Guard and to repair the principal damages in the flood.

"Question 10. What will be the effect of this program on the Laotian negotiation? On neighboring states? On the USSR? On CINCPAC?

"Answer: These are questions to be answered by the appropriate departments in Washington.

"Question 11. Are the U.S. resources available to support this program?

"Answer: Department of Defense indicates yes for military items. It is understood that a special appropriation will be necessary for support of new non-military items."

Lacking better indication of the source or authority of this document, it is not possible to be certain just how closely it corresponded to the personal position of General Taylor; however, the answers attributed to him are consistent in tone and in certain cases correspond in specifics to positions taken in his cables or official report. It is quite plausible that this memorandum expresses accurately the positions General Taylor was taking at the time which lends interest to certain specific judgments mentioned here that are not to be found elsewhere in available documents, particularly bearing on the number and upon the length and scale of involvement of U.S. combat forces. If an objective of the proposed program was (2d) "to fill the military gap during the time necessary to increase the strength of the SVN armed forces and to improve the Civil Guard" -- which "for planning purposes" might be set at the end of 1962 -- it would seem highly questionable if the few thousand U.S. combat forces included in the 8,000 men of the overall task force could be enough significantly to meet this need. Moreover, if the psychological requirement for U.S. combat forces, to restore national confidence in SVN and demonstrate the U.S. commitment, were as critical as it were here stated bluntly to be, the question would arise of the negative impact to be expected if such forces, once introduced, were to be withdrawn before the end of the insurgency, whether at the termination of flood conditions, the end of 1962, or later.

The comment in 2b that the crisis might be used to obtain necessary concessions for Diem contrasts sharply with the general tone of the Taylor report, cables and reported discussions with Diem, which omitted any suggestion that the measures in the proposed program might be used as bargaining counters, or indeed, any emphasis that concessions by Diem

were comparably critical to the success of joint efforts on the same scale as the need for the U.S. commitment and aid.

Finally, the answers to questions 3, 4 and 5 together imply that the proposed program without U.S. combat elements, would very probably not achieve even the short run goal of avoiding a further deterioration of the situation in South Vietnam. (In this it was echoed by the McNamara memorandum of November 8 that even a full commitment to using U.S. combat forces would not be enough to meet the longer run goal of eliminating the threat to the independence of South Vietnam without a willingness to launch air attacks on North Vietnam.)

(Insert - Buhdy memo)

The assessments reflected both in the ISA drafts and the above alleged summary of General Taylor's views found expression and a highly significant memorandum signed by Robert McNamara on 8 November 1961, addressed to the President, on the subject of SVN:

"The basic issue framed by the Taylor Report is whether the U.S. shall:

"a. Commit itself to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to Communism, and

"b. Support this commitment by necessary immediate military actions and preparations for possible later actions.

"The Joint Chiefs, Mr. Gilpatric, and I have reached the following conclusions:

"1. The fall of South Vietnam to Communism would lead to the fairly rapid extension of Communist control, or complete accommodation to Communism, in the rest of mainland Southeast Asia and in Indonesia. The strategic implications worldwide, particularly in the Orient, would be extremely serious.

"2. The chances are against, probably sharply against, preventing that fall by any measures short of the introduction of U.S. forces on a substantial scale. We accept General Taylor's judgment that the various measures proposed by him short of this are useful but will not in themselves do the job of restoring confidence and setting Diem on the way to winning his fight.

"3. The introduction of a U.S. force of the magnitude of an initial 8,000 men in a flood relief context will be of great help to Diem. However, it will not convince the other side (whether the shots are called from Moscow, Peiping, or Hanoi) that we mean business. Moreover, it probably will not tip the scales decisively. We would be almost certain to get increasingly mired down in an inconclusive struggle.

"4. The other side can be convinced we mean business only if we accompany the initial force introduction by a clear commitment to the full objective stated above, accompanied by a warning through some channel to Hanoi that continued support of the Viet Cong will lead to punitive retaliation against North Vietnam.

"5. If we act in this way, the ultimate possible extent of our military commitment must be faced. The struggle may be prolonged and Hanoi and Peiping may intervene overtly. In view of the logistic difficulties faced by the other side, I believe we can assume that the

Striking contrast between the realism in the analysis of the situation and the irrelevance of the conclusion that the Taylor recommendations constitute a first step. What direction would further steps be taken? Should not the conclusion be a warning against any of the

Each time for a first step but do not go further. In retrospect, is not policy in Vietnam made up of first steps? It has occurred to anyone who has seen the disease so clearly analyzed in the back of a plan.

maximum U.S. forces required on the ground in Southeast Asia will not exceed 6 divisions, or about 205,000 men (CINCPAC Plan 32-59, Phase IV). Our military posture is, or with the addition of more National Guard or regular Army divisions, can be made, adequate to furnish these forces without serious interference with our present Berlin plans.

"6. To accept the stated objective is of course a most serious decision. Military force is not the only element of what must be a most carefully coordinated set of actions. Success will depend on factors many of which are not within our control -- notably the conduct of Diem himself and other leaders in the area. Laos will remain a major problem. The domestic political implications of accepting the objective are also grave, although it is our feeling that the country will respond better to a firm initial position than to courses of action that lead us in only gradually, and that in the meantime are sure to involve casualties. The over-all effect on Moscow and Peiping will need careful weighing and may well be mixed; however, permitting South Vietnam to fall can only strengthen and encourage them greatly.

"7. In sum:

a. We do not believe major units of U.S. forces should be introduced in South Vietnam unless we are willing to make an affirmative decision on the issue stated at the start of this memorandum.

b. We are inclined to recommend that we do commit the U.S. to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to Communism and that we support this commitment by the necessary military actions.

c. If such a commitment is agreed upon, we support the recommendations of General Taylor as the first steps toward its fulfillment."

/s/

Robert S. McNamara

This document was obviously intended by the Secretary to be a sobering realistic appraisal that would lay out decisions as to the unfavorable aspects of the various alternatives open to the President in unpromising terms. Certainly, in realism and bluntness with many of the evaluations that were to come later, particularly in 1962 and early 1963. Nevertheless, it is worth noting certain omissions that are evident

with the advantage of hindsight. The paper does assert, that even with an initial 8,000 man U.S. force, but without a clear commitment to preventing the fall of South Vietnam to communism accompanied by a warning of punitive retaliation against North Vietnam, "We would be almost certain to get increasingly mired down in an inconclusive struggle." What if we did accompany the "initial" force introduction, with the commitment and warning? Might we even then become mired down in an inconclusive struggle? In partial answer to this, the memorandum does imply that the other side would be convinced by such measures that we "meant business;" yet, even in this circumstance, the memorandum goes on to imply that Hanoi and Peiping might nevertheless carry on a prolonged struggle and intervene overtly. Although the mention of an ultimate possible requirement of 205,000 men undoubtedly appeared as an unusually forthright depiction of possible ominous consequences of a recommended course of action. In retrospect, from the vantage point of 1967, both the "maximum required" level of U.S. forces and the implied assessment that such force would be effective in achieving success, must appear considerably wishful. Neither in this document nor in any other available to the study was the possibility mentioned in 1961 that subsequent years could find us with 500,000 men in South Vietnam engaged in a struggle that must still be described as "inconclusive." One aspect of this misestimate has already been mentioned: the assumption that the "worst" contingency we might face would be an overt invasion by Hanoi and Peiping, which in turn could be subjected to effective interdiction. The estimate of 200,000 men in this circumstance may or may not have been realistic; this has not been tested although recent experience indicates it would be considerably implausible, but what is evident is that a contingency scarcely considered in 1961 -- the covert introduction of more than 50,000 regular North

J.S. commitment would have avoided the launching of Phase III. If might deter the communist from further escalation, not to deter them from their ultimate objective, one has to demonstrate that we have a political initiative to take.

Vietnamese troops, both entering and operating in a fashion that made them little vulnerable to air attack -- could occupy far greater numbers of U.S. troops than was contemplated for an overt invasion. In short, this memorandum in common with most analyses originating in the DOD, has the implied assumption that if the U.S. were willing to undertake a firm commitment to defense of SVN, it could, by devoting enough resources, achieve the end of eliminating the threat to South Vietnam's independence, without becoming mired in a long, inconclusive struggle.

Most specific sorts of decisions by Diem on changes in Vietnamese politics or administration are mentioned in this memo as critical to the success of the proposed program or the achievement of U.S. objectives, although the general comment is made that "success will depend" on factors including "the conduct of Diem himself and other leaders in the area."

However, this particular factor is described as one of those "which are not within our control" an appreciation conflicting with the view that the U.S. could and should subject the Diem government to considerable influence in this direction and notably by using the proposed program itself as a bargaining tool. At any rate, there is no real estimate here of the possible costs in time, men, or domestic political concessions if the struggle should be, in fact, prolonged and inconclusive precisely because of the failure of Diem to heed our influence or perform adequately.

Finally, although the recommendation is clear that the U.S. not commit major units to Vietnam if it would not undertake a clear commitment at the outset to preventing the fall of South Vietnam to communism, and furthermore it did not include a clear recommendation whether the U.S. should undertake the lesser actions in involving U.S. combat units in the absence of such

The logical conclusion would be either to get in "if the US has the determination and a concept to induce a political reform or else, to write off S. V. N. and give them no last chance with some material assistance to carry on the fighting as long as he can.

a clear decision committing the U.S. to the ultimate defense of South Vietnam. Earlier, the estimate is clearly made that such measures short of the introduction of US forces on a substantial scale (para 2) would probably not be adequate even to the short run goals of "restoring confidence and setting Diem on the way to winning his fight," let alone to the longer run goal of preventing the fall of SVN to communism. Should they then be undertaken at all -- given that they would increasingly commit U.S. prestige to the struggle (in particular, the build-up to 17,000 advisors by the end of 1963) though to a lesser degree than U.S. combat troops -- in the light of the unlikelihood that they would be effective? This question, not specifically answered in this memorandum, was to become the pertinent one in the light of the President's decision, evolving over the next few days, not to undertake at that time the proposed troop commitment, nor the unequivocal commitment to ultimate U.S. involvement proposed by McNamara.

Although the 8 November memo from McNamara did go to the President (a memo from the JCS dated 9 November informed the Secretary of Defense that the JCS fully concurred with the analysis and recommendations in the memo), It was apparently not the last word from the Secretary of Defense. A State-Defense memo for the President dated 11 November 1961 ~~which presented an analysis which differed~~ ^{differing} significantly from the discussion and proposals of the SecDef memo, (apparently reflecting differing inputs from State Department) was circulated for info ^{amotion} among the JCS on 13 November 1961 with the (JCS number 2343/40).

"1. United States National Interests in South Viet-Nam.

"The deteriorating situation in South Viet-Nam requires attention to the nature and scope of United States national interests in that country. The loss of South Viet-Nam to Communism would involve the transfer of a nation of 20 million people from the free world to the Communist bloc. The loss of South Viet-Nam would make pointless any further discussion about the importance of Southeast Asia to the free world; we would have to face the near certainty that the remainder of Southeast Asia and Indonesia would move to a complete accommodation with Communism, if not formal incorporation within the Communist bloc. The United States, as a member of SEATO, has commitments with respect to South Viet-Nam under the Protocol to the SEATO Treaty. Additionally, in a formal statement at the conclusion session of the 1954 Geneva Conference, the United States representative stated that the United States 'would view any renewal of the aggression...with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security.' (Full text of statement attached.)*

"The loss of South Viet-Nam to Communism would not only destroy SEATO but would undermine the credibility of American commitments elsewhere. Further, loss of South Viet-Nam would stimulate bitter domestic controversies in the United States and would be seized upon by extreme elements to divide the country and harass the Administration."

↙ [Whereas analysis originating in MAAG or the DOD did refer often to non-military factors bearing on the insurgency and the government's response to it, these almost always related to defects of administration, the "absence

of a strong non-communist political coalition^{of}--and the bearing this had upon the government's inability to mobilize alternate^{Admiral}(?) leadership ^{into} and resources--though stressed in some embassy and State Department papers and cables and certain NIE's^S was rarely included as a critical factor or mentioned at all in DOD appreciations of the problems in SVN⁷.

"2. The Problem of Saving South Viet-Nam.

"It seems, on the face of it, absurd to think that a nation of 20 million people can be subverted by 15-20 thousand active guerrillas if the Government and people of that country do not wish to be subverted. South Viet-Nam is not, however, a highly organized society with an effective governing apparatus and a population accustomed to carrying civic responsibility. Public apathy is encouraged by the inability of most citizens to act directly as well as by the tactics of terror employed by the guerrillas throughout the countryside. Inept administration and the absence of a strong non-Communist political coalition have made it difficult to bring available resources to bear upon the guerrilla problem and to make the most effective use of available external aid. Under the best of conditions the threat posed by the presence of 15-20 thousand guerrillas, well disciplined under well-trained cadres, would be difficult to meet.

"3. The United States' Objective in South Viet-Nam.

"The United States should commit itself to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Viet-Nam to Communism. The basic means for accomplishing this objective must be to put the Government of South Viet-Nam into a position to win its own war against the guerrillas. We must insist that that Government itself take the measures necessary for that purpose in exchange for large-scale United States assistance in the military, economic and political fields. At the same time we must recognize that it will probably not be possible for the GVN to win this war as long as the flow of men and supplies from North Viet-Nam continues unchecked and the guerrillas enjoy a safe sanctuary in neighboring territory.

"We should be prepared to introduce United States combat forces if that should become necessary for success. Dependent upon the circumstances, it may also be necessary for United States forces to strike at the source of the aggression in North Viet-Nam."

Although this language reflects compromises typical of interagency papers, significant differences from the DOD memo of 8 November are evident here. The "clear objective" proposed is, of course, that recommended

*The main factor
the legacy of French
policy is not
mentioned*

by the McNamara/JCS paper; but the latter paper went on to recommend that if (and only if) the U.S. undertook this commitment, an initial ^{deployment} commitment of substantial U.S. forces was essential in the short run if the aims of this commitment were to be achieved. The formulation here that the U.S. should be prepared to introduce combat forces "if necessary" constituted a significant watering-down of the assessment in the DOD memo (and the notes cited on General Taylor's own views). Moreover, emphasis here on the role of the GVN in winning the war and the corollary that the U.S. "must insist" that the government undertake certain necessary changes "in exchange for" U.S. aid represents a difference both in emphasis and in proposed tactics from the DOD analysis.⁷

"4. The Use of United States Forces in South Viet-Nam.

"The commitment of United States forces to South Viet-Nam involves two different categories: (A) Units of modest size required for the direct support of South Viet-Namese military effort, such as communications, helicopter and other forms of airlift, reconnaissance aircraft, naval patrols, intelligence units, etc., and (B) larger organized units with actual or potential direct military missions. Category (A) should be introduced as speedily as possible. Category (B) units pose a more serious problem in that they are much more significant from the point of view of domestic and international political factors and greatly increase the probabilities of Communist bloc escalation. Further, the employment of United States combat forces (in the absence of Communist bloc escalation) involves a certain dilemma: if there is a strong South Viet-Namese effort, they may not be needed; if there is not such an effort, United States forces could not accomplish their mission in the midst of an apathetic or hostile population. Under present circumstances, therefore, the question of injecting United States and SEATO combat forces should in large part be considered as a contribution to the morale of the South Viet-Namese in their own effort to do the principal job themselves."

^{One side of} ^{the} The "dilemma" described involved a consideration not present in either the Taylor McNamara/JCS discussions: the possibility that under certain circumstances--specifically, in the absence of a strong South Vietnamese effort--the U.S. could not be able to accomplish the mission of preventing

the fall of South Vietnam to communism, even with a clear political commitment and the employment of major U.S. combat forces. From this point of view--reflected in the Rusk cable from Japan--a question of whether the required changes and effort by the South Vietnamese would be forthcoming appears critical to the question of whether the U.S. should commit its prestige heavily to the conflict in South Vietnam and questions of appropriate means by which to influence these political measures by the GVN become urgent issues of policy if the U.S. should decide to commit itself. On the other hand from the point of view of the DOD analysis, the statement here of the other side of the dilemma might well be questioned, namely the proposition that if there was a strong South Vietnamese effort the U.S. forces might not be needed. On this point it could be alluded that some U.S. forces were needed in the interim before either political changes or improvements in RVNAF could be instituted and could take effect (as suggested in the notes on Taylor's views); Moreover, the offer and delivery of U.S. forces might well be the essential ingredient in inducing the South Vietnamese to undertake comparable changes in administration and to encourage a maximum South Vietnamese effort. Nevertheless, the statement here does open up the relevant possibility that such a commitment might not succeed in inducing an effective South Vietnamese effort and in turn that, lacking such Vietnamese effort, the U.S. might be involved in a costly failure. Such considerations, of course, could only weigh against the Presidential decision to commit US forces unless both the present necessity and prospects for success were overwhelmingly demonstrated.]

"5. Probable Extent of the Commitment of United States Troops.

"If we commit Category (B) forces to South Viet-Nam, the ultimate possible extent of our military commitment in Southeast Asia must be

faced. The struggle may be prolonged, and Hanoi and Peiping may overtly intervene. It is the view of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, in the light of the logistic difficulties faced by the other side, we can assume that the maximum United States forces required on the ground in Southeast Asia would not exceed six divisions, or about 205,000 men (CINCPAC Plan 32/59, Phase IV). This would be in addition to local forces and such SEATO forces as may be engaged. It is also the view of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that our military posture is, or, with the addition of more National Guard or regular Army divisions, can be made, adequate to furnish these forces and support them in action without serious interference with our present Berlin plans."

[The assumptions underlying this estimate of maximum force commitment--considerable in retrospect. They have been commented on above.]

"6. Relation to Laos.

"It must be understood that the introduction of American combat forces into Viet-Nam prior to a Laotian settlement would run a considerable risk of stimulating a Communist breach of the cease fire and a resumption of hostilities in Laos. This could present us with a choice between the use of combat forces in Laos or an abandonment of that country to full Communist control. At the present time, there is at least a chance that a settlement can be reached in Laos on the basis of a weak and unsatisfactory Souvanna Phouma Government. The prospective agreement on Laos includes a provision that Laos will not be used as a transit area or as a base for interfering in the affairs of other countries such as South Viet-Nam. After a Laotian settlement, the introduction of United States forces into Viet-Nam could serve to stabilize the position both in Viet-Nam and in Laos by registering our determination to see to it that the Laotian settlement was as far as the United States would be willing to see Communist influence in Southeast Asia develop."

[This consideration could be expected to give the President cause with respect to the introduction of U.S. combat forces into South Vietnam at this particular time especially considering the President's personal commitment--along with certain State Department advisors, but confronting the opposition of skepticism of many influential persons inside and outside the administration -- to achieving a negotiated settlement in Laos. This might well have been a critical factor in determining the President to reject the recommendation of combat forces at this juncture,

without necessarily meaning to reject them for future employment.

Nevertheless, in the light of the urgency of the requirement as represented by the SecDef and Taylor memos, a decision even if it were merely to postpone the commitments of troops was a highly significant one for the President. This was especially true given the fact that, as we have seen, President Diem was aware that this recommendation would be made to the President, and his interpretation of the significance of the U.S. aid package offered would be expected to reflect that knowledge.]

"7. "The Need for Multilateral Action.

"From the political point of view, both domestic and international, it would seem important to involve forces from other nations alongside of United States Category (B) forces in Viet-Nam. It would be difficult to explain to our own people why no effort had been made to invoke SEATO or why the United States undertook to carry this burden unilaterally. Our position would be greatly strengthened if the introduction of forces could be taken as a SEATO action, accompanied by units of other SEATO countries, with a full SEATO report to the United Nations of the purposes of the action itself.

"Apart from the armed forces, there would be political advantage in enlisting the interest of other nations, including neutrals, in the security and well-being of South Viet-Nam. This might be done by seeking such assistance as Malayan police officials (recently offered Diem by the Tumku) and by technical assistance personnel in other fields, either bilaterally or through international organizations.

"8. "Initial Diplomatic Action by the United States.

"If the recommendations, below, are approved, the United States should consult intensively with other SEATO governments to obtain their full support of the course of action contemplated. At the appropriate stage, a direct approach should be made by the United States to Moscow, through normal or special channels, pointing out that we cannot accept the movement of cadres, arms and other supplies into South Viet-Nam in support of the guerrillas. We should also discuss the problem with neutral governments in the general area and get them to face up to their own interests in the security of South Viet-Nam; these governments will be concerned about (a) the introduction of United States combat forces and (b) the withdrawal of United States support from Southeast Asia; their concern, therefore, might be usefully expressed either to Communist bloc countries or in political support for what may prove necessary in South Viet-Nam itself."

"RECOMMENDATIONS

"In the light of the foregoing, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense recommend that:

"1. We now take the decision to commit ourselves to the objective of preventing the fall of South Viet-Nam to Communism and that, in doing so, we recognize that the introduction of United States and other SEATO forces may be necessary to achieve this objective. (However, if it is necessary to commit outside forces to achieve the foregoing objective, our decision to introduce United States forces should not be contingent upon unanimous SEATO agreement thereto.)

"2. The Department of Defense be prepared with plans for the use of United States forces in South Viet-Nam under one or more of the following purposes:

(a) Use of a significant number of United States forces to signify United States determination to defend South Viet-Nam and to boost South Viet-Nam morale.

(b) Use of substantial United States forces to assist in suppressing Viet Cong insurgency short of engaging in detailed counter-guerrilla operations but including relevant operations in North Viet-Nam.

(c) Use of United States forces to deal with the situation if there is organized Communist military intervention.

"3. We immediately undertake the following actions in support of the GVN:

(a) Provide increased air lift to the GVN forces, including helicopters, light aviation, and transport aircraft, manned to the extent necessary by United States uniformed personnel and under United States operational control.

(b) Provide such additional equipment and United States uniformed personnel as may be necessary for air reconnaissance, photography, instruction in and execution of air-ground support techniques, and for special intelligence.

(c) Provide the GVN with small craft, including such United States uniformed advisers and operating personnel as may be necessary for quick and effective operations in effecting surveillance and control over coastal waters and inland waterways.

(d) Provide expedited training and equipping of the civil guard and the self-defense corps with the objective of relieving the regular Army of static missions and freeing it for mobile offensive operations.

(e) Provide such personnel and equipment as may be necessary to improve the military-political intelligence system beginning at the provincial level and extending upward through the Government and the armed forces to the Central Intelligence Organization.

(f) Provide such new terms of reference, reorganization and additional personnel for United States military forces as are required for increased United States participation in the direction and control of GVN military operations and to carry out the other increased responsibilities which accrue to MAAG under these recommendations.

(g) Provide such increased economic aid as may be required to permit the GVN to pursue a vigorous flood relief and rehabilitation program, to supply material in support of the security effort, and to give priority to projects in support of this expanded counter-insurgency program. (This could include increases in military pay, a full supply of a wide range of materials such as food, medical supplies, transportation equipment, communications equipment, and any other items where material help could assist the GVN in winning the war against the Viet Cong.)

(h) Encourage and support (including financial support) a request by the GVN to the FAO or any other appropriate international organization for multilateral assistance in the relief and rehabilitation of the flood area.

(i) Provide individual administrators and advisers for insertion into the Governmental machinery of South Viet-Nam in types and numbers to be agreed upon by the two Governments.

(j) Provide personnel for a joint survey with the GVN of conditions in each of the provinces to assess the social, political, intelligence, and military factors bearing on the prosecution of the counter-insurgency program in order to reach a common estimate of these factors and a common determination of how to deal with them.

"4. Ambassador Nolting be instructed to make an immediate approach to President Diem to the effect that the Government of the United States is prepared to join the Government of Viet-Nam in a sharply increased joint effort to cope with the Viet Cong threat and the ravages of the flood as set forth under 3., above, if, on its part, the Government of Viet-Nam is prepared to carry out an effective and total mobilization of its own resources, both material and human, for the same end. Before setting in motion the United States proposals listed above, the United States Government would appreciate confirmation of their acceptability to the GVN and an expression from the GVN of the undertakings it is prepared to make to insure the success of this joint effort. On the part of the United States, it would be expected that these GVN undertakings would include, in accordance with the detailed recommendations of the Taylor Mission and the Country Team:

(a) Prompt and appropriate legislative and administrative action to put the nation on a wartime footing to mobilize its entire resources. (This would include a decentralization and broadening of the Government so as to realize the full potential of all non-Communist elements in the country willing to contribute to the common struggle.)

(b) The establishment of appropriate Governmental wartime agencies with adequate authority to perform their functions effectively.

(c) Overhaul of the military establishment and command structure so as to create an effective military organization for the prosecution of the war.

"5. Very shortly before the arrival in South Viet-Nam of the first increments of United States military personnel and equipment proposed under 3., above, that would exceed the Geneva Accord ceilings, publish the 'Jordan report' as a United States 'white paper', transmitting it as simultaneously as possible to the Governments of all countries with which we have diplomatic relations, including the Communist states.

"6. Simultaneous with the publication of the 'Jordan report', release an exchange of letters between Diem and the President.

(a) Diem's letter would include: reference to the DRV violations of Geneva Accords as set forth in the October 24 GVN letter to the ICC and other documents; pertinent references to GVN statements with respect to its intent to observe the Geneva Accords; reference to its need for flood relief and rehabilitation; reference to previous United States aid and the compliance hitherto by both countries with the Geneva Accords; reference to the USG statement at the time the Geneva Accords were signed; the necessity now of exceeding some provisions of the Accords in view of the DRV violations thereof; the lack of aggressive intent with respect to the DRV: GVN intent to return to strict compliance with the Geneva Accords as soon as the DRV violations ceased; and request for additional United States assistance in framework foregoing policy. The letter should also set forth in appropriate general terms steps Diem has taken and is taking to reform Governmental structure.

(b) The President's reply would be responsive to Diem's request for additional assistance and acknowledge and agree to Diem's statements on the intent promptly to return to strict compliance with the Geneva Accords as soon as DRV violations have ceased.

"7. Simultaneous with steps 5. and 6., above, make a private approach to the Soviet Union that would include: our determination to prevent the fall of South Viet-Nam to Communism by whatever means is necessary; our concern over dangers to peace presented by the aggressive DRV policy with respect to South Viet-Nam; our intent to return to full compliance with the Geneva Accords as soon as the DRV does so; the distinction we draw between Laos and South Viet-Nam; and our expectation that the Soviet Union will exercise its influence on the Chicoms and the DRV.

"8. A special diplomatic approach made to the United Kingdom in its role as co-Chairman of the Geneva Conference requesting that the United Kingdom seek the support of the Soviet-co-Chairman for a cessation of DRV aggression against South Viet-Nam.

"9. A special diplomatic approach also to be made to India, both in its role as Chairman of the ICC and as a power having relations with Peiping and Hanoi. This approach should be made immediately prior to public release of the 'Jordan report' and the exchange of letters between Diem and the President.

"10. Immediately prior to the release of the 'Jordan report' and the exchange of letters between Diem and the President, special diplomatic approaches also to be made to Canada, as well as Burma, Indonesia, Cambodia, Ceylon, the UAR, and Yugoslavia. SEATO, NATO, and OAS members should be informed through those organizations, with selected members also informed individually. The possibility of some special approach to Poland as a member of the ICC should also be considered."

[The precise status of this document is not clear from the evidence presently available to this study. It has been quoted in full above because it corresponds more closely than any other document prior to the President's decision to the course of action undertaken by the President, and hence it is plausible that the reasoning underlying the recommendations was at least made known to the President and may have been persuasive to him. Hence its contrasts with other inputs to the President whose

originators are unclear is of special interest. It seems likely that this paper was either a State-Defense memo presented to the President on 11 November 1961 -- representing at least OSD and State Department inputs, with an undetermined amount of JCS input--or else a State Department draft of a proposed State-Defense memo, presented for comments and input by OSD and/or JCS. The primary contract with the SecDef and Taylor assessments is that the recommendations for immediate actions include only those "lesser actions" -- short of U.S. combat forces -- which the SECDEF and Taylor memos described as useful but as highly inadequate even to the short run aim of preventing a further deterioration in the situation in South Vietnam. Assuming an agreement on objectives, this difference could be rationalized only by a differing judgment of the degree or urgency of the requirement for combat forces to achieve the objectives, and/or an increased emphasis on such short run political objectives as protecting the on-going Laos negotiations. As commented above, an increased emphasis on the critical importance of GVN political changes, with a willingness to see U.S. aid at least temporarily withheld as a bargaining counter in forcing such changes, is also evident in this paper.]

Comments for SecDef on 9 November 1961 by William Bundy, Acting Assistant SecDef (ISA) on what may have been an earlier draft of this 11 November paper, but which apply to the paper as it stands note that "the paper does not say whether we will in fact send combat forces, and if so, when." Bundy raises the question:

"....Does it mean 'take the seven steps and then test,' or what? If it means 'make the commitment and take only the seven steps,' then I would agree with George Ball that this is the worst of both worlds."

This is perhaps the only statement in the documents available which takes the form: "Do not take even the 'lesser actions'--with the increased involvement they imply--if you are not prepared to go all the way, including almost surely the employment of major U.S. combat forces." In retrospect, the presence in Vietnam of 17-19,000 U.S. advisors by late 1963 was itself a commitment comparable to, even if marginally less than, the deployment of U.S. combat units; in other words, it would appear to be self-deceptive to have imagined that this deployment would be sharply less committing and an initial deployment of some U.S. combat units. However, at the same time, it should be noted that nowhere in the staff papers or discussions held in 1961 does any indication appear that the "advisory" and support effort implied by the decisions of late 1961 might reach the proportions of 17,000. On the contrary, something between 2,000 and 3,000 seems to have been envisioned.

The Bundy comments of 9 November also point out:

"...The timing of action is not covered. In particular, the relation to Laos is left hanging. Does the draft mean wait at all costs till Laos is buttoned up? If so, it may be indefinite and futile, and in itself condemn us to the 'seven points' only. On the other hand, it is true that if we rely on sea lift the time of transit from the US (35 days) or Hawaii (25-30 days since shipping has to come from the US) would itself mean that, even if we decided now, we could hold the impact of arrival of the major force off till a month from now. If the movement leaked, we could argue a maneuver with at least faint plausibility. By airlift or use of Okinawa forces we can of course get some forces in quicker -- a week by sea from Okinawa, 7-10 days to get a brigade from the US by air However, on this whole question of relation to Laos, the tough question is whether the cat won't be out of the bag the moment we say to Diem that we will send forces. To me, the draft judgment that there is 'considerable risk' of the other side moving in Laos is a bit over-stated. There is a risk, all right, but the right noises would help keep it down -- and it doesn't wholly go away even with a settlement. This again argues against too fixed calculation on the timing of a settlement."

Although the specific draft to which these comments apply is not available, they clearly reveal DOD thinking on the urgency of the deployment of U.S. combat units, and they draw attention to an ambiguity of the recommendations of the 11 November paper on the relation of such deployment to a Laos settlement. Bundy added the comment:

"...The paper does not mention the issue of honoring the Laos border. This does hinge on a settlement. If there is one, or about to be one, my own judgment is that we would be wiser, net, to honor the border. However, we might have to change later if the flow kept up -- and the odds are that it would."

See NOTE: ~~NEED~~ 618 *follows*

(State to Saigon, NIACT 618)

"....Review of Taylor Report has resulted in following basic decisions:

"1. Must essentially be a GVN task to contain and reduce the VC threat at present level of capability. Means organizing to go on offensive. We are prepared to contemplate further assistance after joint assessment establishes needs and possibilities of aid more precisely.

"2. No amount of extra aid can be substitute for GVN taking measures to permit them to assume offensive and strengthen the administrative and political bases of government.

"3. Do not propose to introduce into GVN the US combat troops now, but propose a phase of intense public and diplomatic activity to focus on infiltration from North. Shall decide later on course of action should infiltration not be radically reduced.

"4. On flood, decide best course to treat as primarily civil problem, and occasion should be used to draw in as many nationals of other countries as can be used in GVN flood plan. Have been encouraged this course on advise of Desai of Indian Foreign Office who observed a good thing if some Indians and Burmese involved constructively in SVN and subject to VC attack. We prepared to put maximum pressure on FAO. Do not exclude ad hoc US military aid in flood area.

"5. Diplomatically position that the violations to be documented in Jorden report and strong references to DRV attack against SVN in DM's letter to Kennedy, need not confirm to the world and Communists that Geneva accords are being disregarded by our increased aid. Need not accuse ourselves publicly, make Communist job easier. GVN should be advised to counter charges by leveling charges against DRV and insisting that if ICC investigates in SVN must equally investigate in NVN. Appreciate approach will make ICC task difficult but will explain position to Canadians and Indians to get their support.

"6. A crucial element in USG willingness to move forward is concrete demonstration by Diem that he is now prepared to work in an orderly way on his subordinates and broaden the political base of his regime.

"7. Package should be presented as first steps in a partnership in which US is prepared to do more as joint study of facts and GVN performance makes increased US aid possible and productive.

"8. Still possible Laotian settlement can be reached pertaining our minimum objective of independent Laos on the basis of a neutral

coalition, (although weak and unsatisfactory), headed by Soubanna. Would include provision Laos not be used as transit area or base for interference in SVN. Therefore must keep in mind impact of action in SVN or prospects for acceptable Laos settlement.

"9. Introduction of US or Seato forces into SVN before Laotian settlement might wreck changes for agreement, lead to break up of Geneva conference, break Laos cease fire by communists with resumption of hostilities.

"10. Decision to introduce US combat forces in GVN would have to be taken in light of GVN effort, including support from people, Laotian situation, Berlin crisis, readiness of allies or sharply increased tension with Bloc, and enormous responsibilities which would have to be borne by US in event of escalation SEA or other areas.

"11. Hope measures outlined in instructions will galvanize and supplement GVN effort, making decision on use of US combat forces unnecessary and no need for decision in effect to shift primary responsibility for defense of SVN to USG.

"12. We are fully cognizant of extent to which decisions if implemented through Diem's acceptance will sharply increase the commitment of our prestige struggle to save SVN.

"13. Very strictly for your own information, DOD has been instructed to prepare plans for the use of US combat forces in SVN under various contingencies, including stepped up infiltration as well as organized inventory (sic) military intervention. However objective of our policy is to do all possible to accomplish purpose without use of US combat forces."

On the basis of the discussions and presentations following General Taylor's return, President Kennedy made decisions which were embodied in the cable of instructions to Ambassador Nolting dated November 14, 1961 (the Joint undertakings for the two governments were reproduced in NASIM 111 of 22 November 1961; they follow in detail the undertakings recommended in the State-Defense memo reproduced above):

"You are instructed to seek an immediate appointment with President Diem and inform him that President Kennedy, after conferring with General Taylor and carefully considering his report, has decided that the Government of the United States is prepared to join the Government of Viet-Nam in a sharply increased joint effort to avoid a further deterioration in the situation to South Viet-Nam and eventually to contain and eliminate the threat to its independence.

"The joint effort we have in mind would require certain undertakings by both governments, as outlined below:

"1. On its part, the U.S. would immediately take the following actions in support of the GVN:

"a. Provide increased air lift to the GVN forces, including

helicopters, light aviation, and transport aircraft, manned to the extent necessary by United States uniformed personnel and other United States operational control.

"b. Provide such additional equipment and United States uniformed personnel as may be necessary for air reconnaissance, photography, instruction in and execution of air-ground support techniques, and for special intelligence.

"c. Provide the GVN with some small craft, including such United States uniformed advisers and operating personnel as may be necessary for operations in effecting surveillance and control over coastal waters and inland waterways.

"d. Provide expedited training and equipping of the civil guard and the self-defense corps with the objective of relieving the regular army of static missions and freeing it for mobile offensive operations.

"e. Provide such personnel and equipment as may be necessary to improve the military-political intelligence system beginning at the provincial level and extending upward through the Government and the armed forces to the Central Intelligence Organization.

"f. Provide such new terms of reference, reorganization and additional personnel for United States military forces as are required for increased United States military assistance in the operational collaboration with the GVN and operational direction of U.S. forces, and to carry out the other increased responsibilities which accrue to the U.S. military authorities under these recommendations.

"g. Provide such increased economic aid as may be required to permit the GVN to pursue a vigorous flood relief and rehabilitation program, to supply material in support of the security efforts, and to give priority to projects in support of this expanded counter-insurgency program. (FYI. This could include increases in military pay, a full supply of a wide range of materials such as food, medical supplies, transportation equipment, communications equipment, and any other items where material help could assist the GVN in winning the war against the Viet Cong. END FYI)

"h. Encourage and support (including financial support) a request by the GVN to the FAO or any other appropriate international organization for multi-lateral assistance in the relief and rehabilitation of the flood area. (One objective here would be political objective of engaging widest possible multinational interest in and concern with GVN.)

"i. Provide individual administrators and advisers for the Governmental machinery of South Viet-Nam in types and numbers to be agreed upon by the two Governments.

"j. Provide personnel for a joint survey with the GVN of conditions in each of the provinces to assess the social, political, intelligence and military factors bearing on the prosecution of the counter-insurgency program in order to reach a common estimate of these factors and a common determination of how to deal with them.

"2. On its part, the GVN would initiate the following actions:

"a. Prompt and appropriate legislative and administrative action to put the nation on a wartime footing to mobilize its entire resources. (This would include a decentralization and broadening of the Government so as to realize the full potential of all non-Communist elements in the country willing to contribute to the common struggle.)

"b. The vitalization of appropriate governmental wartime agencies with adequate authority to perform their functions effectively.

"c. Overhaul of the military establishment and command structure so as to create an effective military organization for the prosecution of the war and assure a mobile offensive capability for the Army.

"3. Before setting in motion the joint effort outlined above, the United States Government would need confirmation of its acceptability by the GVN, and an expression from the GVN of the measures it is prepared to take under the broad headings listed in para 2 above in order to ensure the success of this joint effort. The foregoing subheadings under para 2 are purposely broadly phrased so as to permit you to spell out specifics in manner you feel will be most effective. We realize that the U.S. cannot successfully dictate from here precisely what measures the GVN should take since they might be unworkable in the circumstances peculiar to South Viet-Nam and necessarily must leave these details and manner of their negotiation with Diem to your judgment. However, it is most important that Diem come forth with changes which will be recognized as having real substance and meaning. Rightly or wrongly his regime is widely criticized abroad and in the U.S., and if we are to give our substantial support we must be able to point to real administrative political and social reforms and a real effort to widen its base that will give maximum confidence to the American people, as well as to world opinion that our efforts are not directed towards the support of an unpopular or ineffective regime, but rather towards supporting the combined efforts of all the non-Communist people of the GVN against a Communist take-over. You should make this quite clear, and indicate that the U.S. contribution to the proposed joint effort depends heavily upon his response to this point.

"4. It is anticipated that one of the first questions President Diem will raise with you after your presentation of the above joint proposals will be that of introducing U.S. combat troops. You are authorized to remind him that the actions we already have in mind involve a substantial number of U.S. military personnel for operational duties in Viet-Nam and that we believe that these forces performing crucial missions can greatly increase the capacity of GVN forces to win their war against the Viet Cong. You can also tell him that we believe that the missions being undertaken by our forces, under present circumstances, are more suitable for white foreign troops than garrison duty or missions involving the seeking out of Viet Cong personnel submerged in the Viet-Nam population. You can assure him that the USG at highest levels will be in daily contact with the situation in Viet-Nam and will be in constant touch with him about requirements of the situation.

"5. You should inform Diem that, in our minds, the concept of the joint undertaking envisages a much closer relationship than the present one of acting in an advisory capacity only. We would expect to share in the decision-making processes in the political, economic and military fields as they affected the security situation.

"6. You may inform Diem that concurrently with the commencement of the joint effort, we intend to make additional strong approaches to the Soviet Bloc designed to impress them with our determination to see that South Viet-Nam is not overrun and to deter them from continuing their aggression.

"7. FYI. If Diem responds well to above demarche, and outlines measures he will take corresponding to para 3, which you and we regard as satisfactory, you should then inform him that we wish to provide our aid in response to his written request, to which we would plan to give wide publicity. This, combined with the Jorden Report, would serve as the public base for our support. Consequently, you may at a time you consider suitable offer him the proposed draft letter from him to President Kennedy the text of which is supplied in the immediately following telegram. When you give him the draft, you may indicate that we do not expect his letter to be a verbatim copy. In fact, we hope it will not be, but we think it wise from the standpoint of world opinion to include the substantive points mentioned therein. We shall keep you advised concerning the handling and timing of release of the Jorden Report and the letter from Diem. President Kennedy contemplates immediate strong, affirmative reply to satisfactory letter along indicated lines from President Diem, which also will simultaneously be made public."

/s/ Rusk

in D. 618 and 619

While the emphasis on a political quid pro quo from the Diem regime, both for U.S. domestic reasons and for the success of the joint effort in Vietnam, reflected attitudes prevailing in the State Department rather than the DOD. The notion, in the directives to Nolting, that the U.S. sought a "partnership" with the GVN, ^{on the other hand,} did follow the emphasis in the Taylor Mission report. Indeed, in that report, the notion of close U.S. liaison and participation in decision-making throughout the GVN hierarchy was regarded as a substitute for attempting to induce Diem to undertake formal political and administrative reforms. Though skeptical either that Diem could be profitably replaced or that he could be induced to change his style of administration or politics, the Taylor Mission report was optimistically that the Diem Regime would accept a ubiquitous U.S. presence in its councils that might achieve the same ends. That report called for "a shift in the American relation to the Vietnamese effort from advise to limited partnership," to the end that "through this working association at all levels, the US must bring about de facto changes in Diem's method of administration and seek to bring all elements of the Vietnamese government closer to the Vietnamese people." "Moreover, there is evidence that Diem is, in principle, prepared for this step, and that most if not all elements in his establishment are eagerly awaiting it."

Whatever the attitude of subordinate elements in the Diem Administration (and this may have been an accurate description, for example, of Vice President Tho's views) Diem soon made it clear that to broaden his decision-making councils to include Americans was no more palatable than ^{to include} including oppositionist Vietnamese. On 18 November, Nolting reported on his first discussion with Diem conveying President Kennedy's

decisions on the Taylor report.

"I read from, and later expanded on, paper prepared from instruction reftels. Stressed theme of partnership requiring far reaching and difficult measures on both sides. Left Diem to do same hard thinking of his own on required GVN actions, and did not at this stage present list of specifics with respect GVN reorganization.

"I gave him detailed outline of proposed US actions contained paras 1, 5 and 6 of Reftel and, for precision, left him paper containing full substance sub-para H through J, para 1, less FYI sub-para G.

"I believe I made it unmistakably clear, and repeated the point several times, that US readiness to go ahead with proposed joint effort depend heavily on his compliance with proposed GVN actions in administrative, political and social fields which will be recognized as having real substance and meaning. I urged that he let me know as soon as possible his idea on this point, as well as on our proposal as a whole.

"Diem promised to do so and did at this stage attempt to give a considered reaction to our proposal. As anticipated, his first question was re introduction US combat troops. I replied along line para 4 reftel and pointed out that measures set out paras 1A, B and C would involve US uniformed military personnel in roles which could expose them to enemy action. In response to Diem's question he said that in my personal opinion these personnel would be authorized to defend themselves if attacked. I pointed out that this was one reason why the decisions were very grave from US standpoint and why we needed substantial GVN response on actions it proposed to take.

"Diem said that he presumed I realized that our proposals involved the question of the responsibility of the Government of Viet Nam. Viet Nam, he said, did not want to be a protectorate.

"I said that this was well understood; we for our part did not wish to make it one. Diem also pointed out that GVN was constantly in process of making reforms but major action could not be taken without thorough consideration and without having always in mind that there was a war to be won. Object was to restore order, not to create disorder. I said I recognized that this was a delicate judgment, in my opinion, as a friend of his country and of him, his greater risk was to stand pat, or act too cautiously. It was my sincere belief that it would be possible for him to streamline his government and delegate authority to greater extent and in addition to take into the government and into his confidence capable people who are now sitting on the sidelines. In past, he had told me that he had tried latter without success but I believed that if he tried once again and offered real responsibility to people on sidelines at this critical juncture, it would have great quieting effect on whole country. The President did not respond directly

on this point. He did expatiate at length on the difficulty of finding people willing to accept responsibility, on the shortage of trained and able people, on the effects on the people of 80 years of French colonial rule, and on the mentality and habits of the Vietnamese people - a theme on which he has often elaborated in the past.

"On the whole, I am not discouraged at Diem's reaction. In fact, he took our proposals rather better than I had expected. He has promised to call me as soon as he has been able to reflect upon our proposals and, until we have heard his considered reaction, I think it would be idle to speculate on outcome. He requested copy of paper from which I read and talked, which I am sending him. He said he would ask his cabinet for ideas.

"I urge that every possible effort be made to avoid leaks on nature of our proposals, particularly the 'quid pro quo' aspects, in interest of getting result we desire.

"Draft Diem-Kennedy letter not yet shown to Diem and will be modified accordance DepTel 635."

(From Saigon 678, November 18, 1961)

The similarity of this discussion with those held between Durbrow and Diem just a year earlier is evident. If there was a difference now, it was that this U.S. point of view was being presented in the context of responding to urgent requests from Diem for increased US support and reassurance. We were, indeed, offering substantially increased aid, conditioned upon GVN acceptance of the quid pro quo we asked: which was, in itself, essentially the same as that put forward by Durbrow in 1960 and early 1961. Thus, the implied threat of withholding this aid if the GVN compliance was not forthcoming ^{any} which seemed to have given us substantially greater bargaining power than before. Offsetting this, however, was the fact that we were not offering to Diem either of the two types of reassurance he had emphasized in his request: a bilateral treaty or U.S. combat forces. The primary message the Taylor Mission had returned with from Vietnam had been that the latter forces were essential to

achieving the reassurance of Diem, which in turn was crucial to achieving an adequate working relationship with him, in which he might be disposed to make political and administrative concessions. "To be persuasive, this commitment must include the sending to Vietnam of some U.S. military forces...it is evident that morale in Vietnam will rapidly crumble -- and in SEA only slightly less quickly -- if the sequence of expectations set in motion by Vice President Johnson's visit and climaxed by General Taylor's Mission are not soon followed by a hard U.S. commitment in the ground in Vietnam." To the extent that this judgment ^{was} ~~were~~ valid, one could expect recalcitrance from Diem if he were disappointed in his hopes for a U.S. ground commitment.

We had not long to wait for indications of his disappointment.

4

These came first through Thuan, who brought the news that the set of proposals for increased aid intended primarily to reassure President Diem had in fact led Diem to "wonder whether U.S. was getting ready to back out on Vietnam as ... we had done in Laos." If this was disheartening, it should not have been surprising; for as Thuan pointed out, many high-level Vietnamese were well-aware -- and we knew it -- that after

7. → General Taylor ^{discussions} had been led to hope that U.S. troops would be arriving, as the ultimate U.S. commitment to the defense of Vietnam. Any offers short of these -- such as Nolting was now bearing to the GVN -- were inevitably to be interpreted in the light of these hopes, and the "signal" of US intentions that the present offers represented could not but be disappointing to the Vietnamese. This Thuan confirmed:

"Saw Thuan November 20 on several matters, and in course conversation asked him what he could tell me re schedule of follow-up discussions with President Diem on recent demarche. This led to long, wide-ranging, and pessimistic account by Thuan of how things stand here. I do not take his pessimism too seriously -- indeed it may be only bargaining tactic -- and conversation gave me opportunity to clarify and put in proportion proposed 'new partnership' envisaged in our position, and reasons for it.

"Thuan said that Diem had not yet discussed fully with him US proposals presented last Friday; but had given him impression of being 'very sad and very disappointed'. Thuan said Diem had said he now hesitates to put proposals before even his cabinet ministers, fearing that they would be disappointed and lose heart. He had intended to discuss US proposals with both cabinet and selected members of assembly who had been consulted re advisability of US forces at time of Taylor Mission, but now thought contrast between his earlier question and our proposals too striking. Thuan conveyed impression that Diem is brooding over US proposals and has made no move yet to develop specific ideas on actions GVN expected to take. Thuan said President's attitude seemed to be that US asking great concessions of GVN in realm its sovereignty, in exchange for little additional help; that this is great disappointment after discussions with General Taylor involving, in particular, concept of Delta Task Force; that Diem seemed to wonder whether US was getting ready to back out on Viet Nam, as he suggested, we had done in Laos."

(From Saigon 687, 22 November 1961, Sec. 1 of 2)

the context of "joint undertakings", that is, demands for a quid pro quo from the GVN. Thuan's reply expressed the sense of a "dilemma" ~~conflict~~ (as presented in the August 1961 NIE) between political demands for broader government and the requirements for strong central leadership to win a counterinsurgency war.

"....What I had proposed on Kennedy's instructions was a serious, difficult, and far-reaching set of proposals designed to reverse the trend and eventually to win the struggle in Viet Nam. I said I was sure he knew this, and he confirmed it. I told him that we on our side had to have a structure for improved performance on the part of GVN in several areas, in order to make far reaching political decision involving substantial additional US effort, manpower, resources, and prestige. Furthermore, the United States had no idea whatsoever of wanting to make South Vietnam a US 'protectorate' (Diem's word); on contrary, if SVN could protect itself, nothing would please us more. The fact is that we are trying in a most difficult situation to develop means to help SVN protect itself, and measures we propose are very far reaching indeed. I explained reasons why we considered introduction US combat forces, either in anti-guerrilla war or as garrison troops, unwise; and how we had searched for, and found, substantial measures to bolster GVN's own effort in anti-subversion war, which would be effective if GVN reorganized itself to make them so. I also emphasized the seriousness of our proposal to bring international pressure, and effective pressure, on communist bloc to discontinue infiltrations. I elaborated on benefits to SVN from multi-national participation in civilian effort re rehabilitation flooded provinces.

"Thuan seemed to be torn between appreciation of soundness and significance of our proposals and the difficulties, political, psychological and administrative, which Diem faces. He said frankly that given the structure of Vietnamese society, the paucity of people willing to assume responsibility, the tendency to analyze and criticize rather than to act, he shared President's fear that public acceptance of our proposals would disastrously weaken strong Diem leadership which he considers indispensable at this time. 'Without his determined and active leadership, we would collapse.' On other hand, he recognized our needs in terms US and world opinion. He inquired most earnestly whether our proposals could not be done 'in a practical manner', meaning step-by-step, without publicity, and without requiring any over all GVN acceptance. Intended to present reorganization and strengthening GVN intelligence service as a case in point. He said Diem would do these things one by one on a practical basis if right men could be found, but he would not accept anything that looked to public as a sweeping reorganization under US pressure. I told him that essentially it is results, not appearances, that we are seeking; that if GVN would come ... with specific suggestions for improvements we would try to meet them on the means; but that our experience to date had led us to conclusion that real measures of decentralization and delegation of authority, strengthening of personnel in administrative positions, and broadening popular appeal are urgently required."

(Ibid).

Yes men and responsible are incompatible. In fact I believe that in 1951 no man of character would have accepted without very hard conditions, a cabinet post.

Thuan then raised some doubts about the proposed increase in advisors -- the implications for the American command structure and its relations with the JGS, and the political risks of "imposing" advisers at the lower levels -- indicating reservations about U.S. "participation" on the military side as on the political side.

"Turning to military, Thuan asked what sort of 'new terms of reference' for MAAG are envisaged. I said that as minimum Chief MAAG would have to have command authority for any US operational forces introduced, in addition to present advisory authority; as maximum, and depending on GVN needs and wishes, he might have a role like that of General Van Fleet in Greece. I described how Greece, nearly submerged by communism, had been able to reverse the trend and win, making full use of US operational advice as well as material laid; and that Greece is now a fully independent member of world community. Thuan said that in military command structure, as in so many others, there is grave lack of competent people willing to discharge responsibility. I said we could help in this. He said he knew we could, but trouble was that none of their people, especially military, liked to have their incompetence exposed. I asked him whether he was telling me that introduction of US advisors for operations would bring about such resentment on part ARVN officer corps as to cause military coup d'etat. He said that was what he had in mind. I said I thought we could find a way; it would depend on how the matter was handled and the quality of the men we might contribute. I again urged Thuan to urge President Diem to come up with specific proposals. I said we are not inflexible, but determined this time to work out a new partnership which would give real results and win the struggle, now going badly. We do not wish to take over, but we had to be assured that additional US commitments, plus present large-scale aid, was going to have real results. Otherwise, I saw no way of winning.

"I think my best tactic is to wait a few days for Diem's response, I do not want to seem to be pressing him to buy our proposals, and I think Thuan will help."

(From Saigon 687, 22 November 1961, Section 2 of 2)

I suspect that Thuan and Nhu were afraid of the contrary, that US advisors would "buy" their V.N. counterpart, short circuit Nhu and impose U.S. will through the control of the army.

What a naivety after the general failure of the U.S. argument!

toward

The next signal of Diemist attitudes for the proposed "participation" in their decisions came from the government-controlled press. A Reuters dispatch of 25 November appears ^{ed} on that day in the Washington Post under the headline "Saigon Daily Attacks Long-Immune U.S."

"A newspaper that operates under a form of government control today attacked United States policy in Southeast Asia. It was the first such attack there in recent years.

"The Saigon Thoi Bao (Saigon Times), published--under the close watch of the government, as are all other Vietnamese dailies, accused the United States of attempting to use South Viet-Nam as 'a pawn of capitalist imperialism.'

"The paper is known to adhere closely to the thinking of the Directorate-General of Information.

"The paper lashed out at American policy in Laos, which it said consisted of 'empty declarations...and bourgeois and inefficient methods.'

"The result is that the Kingdom of Laos is now bogged down in the marshes and the Communists are in a position of conquest," the paper added. It accused the United States of trying to use in South Viet-Nam the same methods that were unsuccessful in Laos.

"It is a common occurrence for Vietnamese dailies to appear with blank spaces on the front page, indicating censorship. It was considered significant that the Thoi Bao editorials were not censored by the government.

"The criticism came at a time when American-South Vietnamese relations were reported to be at a low ebb.

"A spokesman for the paper said editions attacking U.S. policy were record sellers and that an extra 20,000 copies were printed and sold. Civilian and military radio programs carried reports of the editorials without comment.

"The paper accused the United States of using the reasoning of businessmen. It said 'history has proved that without receiving any aid from anybody, the Vietnamese people have had magical power to survive in the face of the aggression from the north (China).'"

* * *

look very much like Ky's blackmail practice

This tactic was to become more familiar to us in subsequent years, but in 1961 it was, as William Bundy described it in a memo of 25 November 1961 for the Secretary of Defense, "a most novel and disturbing symptom." (Bundy took this occasion to note that in view of Nolting's negative talks with both Diem and Thuan "we badly need something to sweeten the mixture," and reiterated the suggestion that General Lansdale be returned to Vietnam.

"Re General Lansdale, General McGarr has sent two messages by special channels reporting disappointment by Diem that no decision has been made on Ed's coming back. (From these and other indications, it is clear that McGarr himself would favor this.) In spite of the importance of Ed's current assignment, I think he belongs in Vietnam, where he is of unique value.")

Nolting sought an interview with President Diem to protest the tone of this and related articles:

"....I told him that I had not come to push him on response to our proposals of November 17, although I hoped he would soon be in position to give me his views. I wished specifically to bring to his attention two articles appearing in one Vietnamese newspaper which were untrue in their implication and obviously damaging to our joint enterprise. Our one hour's conversation was inconclusive, but rather revealing.

"Diem said he had just read the articles in question. They did reflect, in his opinion, the latent feelings of most Vietnamese (and, he added most Asians) concerning fancied or real conditions attached to Western aid. He went on to say that, because of this fact he had not told anyone except Thuan, Ngo Dinh Nhu and Vu Van Mau the content of our proposals of last week. He said he feared the reaction even among his own cabinet members. I said I thought he misjudged their sentiments. Diem went on to say that newspaper articles in question were not inspired by government and could not have been based on knowledge of US proposals (except that obtained from US press), but that they expressed a point of view which he felt would be widespread if our proposals were known....."

(From Saigon 708, 25 November 1961)

Diem then proceeded to lay down his position with respect to "joint undertakings," and specifically his sense of priorities between

"liberalization" and "security." (In both respects, his reaction validated the prediction -- if not the implied prescription for U.S. policy -- offered by Ambassador Kenneth Young to the Vietnam Task Force on April 24, 1961:

in

"There are six areas/which we can easily go wrong with President Ngo if we do not act correctly...."

"3) We must place the security and pacification problem first in priority in resuming a new dialogue with him, and not 'liberalization'...."

"6) We must be very careful how we handle the 'quid pro quo'. There is no quicker way to spike a good impression with Diem than to talk about the 'or elses'. He bristles. But he understands the need for mutuality.")

(Encl. to Ltr from Ambassador to Thailand, Kenneth T. Young, Jr., to The Honorable Roswell L. Gilpatric, Deputy SecDef, 25 April 1961).

"Throughout this discussion, Diem continued to make references to the quid pro quo aspects of our proposals, claiming that they played right into the hands of the communists. He argued that we are pressing him to give a monopoly on nationalism to the communists. I told him that this was the exact opposite of our aim; that we were not seeking quid pro quo as such, but were definitely seeking a structure of government in Vietnam, under his leadership, which could bear the weight of increased US assistance and could channel that assistance effectively; and that we were definitely seeking a basis in US and world opinion to enable us to support his government even more heavily. He promised next week to sit down and systematically go over our proposals point by point and to give his considered reaction. I said it would be helpful if he could give his response in due course in written form for clarity and precision. Throughout, Diem stressed that any attempt to 'broaden the government' and to 'make it more popular' was putting the cart before the horse. Giving security to the people, he said, is the first essential of regaining popular support; it is communist terror and propaganda which is destroying Vietnamese support of their government; the will exists but can only be demonstrated when the people are free to express it; no additions of 'dissidents' to his government would alter this fact. Moreover, he had many independents in the government already, and had had for many years. He cited educators, doctors, and others in this regard."

This same sense of tactical priorities had been expressed on the American side not only in ^{the Taylor Report and} DOD analyses but in the August 1961 NIE. The State Department had lent a different emphasis to Washington guidance to our mission in Saigon, and up to this point, Noltings' reported discussions with Diem and Thuan had reflected it. But Noltings' concluding comment at this point suggested a shift toward the NIE/Young/DOD view, in the face of Diem's intransigence:

"Without prejudging outcome these negotiations, I think we should be thinking whether we should not put major stress on efficiency in GVN rather than on more nebulous concept of 'political reform'. I think we can get a certain measure of improvement in GVN efficiency, which may open up possibility of political liberalization and broadening of political base, with all deliberate speed."

(Saigon 708)

The reply from the Department revealed concern over Diem's "misunderstandings" of the intent of the cable of instructions to Nolting (to Saigon 619) and sought to clarify it in ways that would mollify him. (To Saigon 693).

"As seen from here, there are two immediate and essential requirements in situation:

"1. Frontal effort on your part to correct Diem's apparent misinterpretation of intentions of our proposals with respect GVN organization; and

"2. Early opportunity for a sustained private conversation and full discussion between you and Diem on concrete measures to accomplish objectives of improving GVN image and making GVN more effective instrument for prosecution of war."

The Department suggested that Diem might have taken the offer of "individual administrators and advisors for the governmental machinery of South Vietnam," along with the emphasis on "a much closer relationship than the present one of acting in an advisory capacity only" (paras 1(i) and 5, To Saigon 619) "as indicating intention on part USG take over much greater degree of control that in fact our intent."

"First, point one (i) specifically provides such action only in agreement between two governments and was included to meet Diem's request to Taylor and Rostow for assistance in meeting shortage trained administrators. We certainly have no intention of packing his administration with Americans against his will or 'taking over his government'.

(To Saigon 693)

With respect to the sentence from Deptel 619 that "we would expect to share in the decision-making process in the political, economic and military fields as they affected the security situation":

"....what we have in mind is that, in operations directly related to the security situation, partnership will be so close that one party will not take decisions or actions affecting the other without full and frank prior consultation...."

With respect to the paragraph ⁱⁿfrom the de marche to Diem concerning undertakings by the GVN (para 2) (To Saigon 619) and the background paragraph cited earlier on the U.S. desire to share in decision-making, the Department "clarified" these as being merely:

"...broad guides on which we rely on you and Country Team to translate in your negotiations into such specific measures as you consider effective and practical. Seen from here, crucial elements appear to be:

- "a. Follow through on intelligence reform and collaboration;
- "b. Prompt conduct day to day security business through Cabinet or Internal Security Council;
- "c. Clarification of military command channels;
- "d. Prompt follow-through on Thuan's suggestion of security survey in three corps area;
- "e. Constitution effective frontier ranger force."

This description of "crucial elements" dropped from that category any hint of the element so long known to be unpalatable to Diem, expressed in 619 as:

"Prompt and appropriate legislative and administrative action to put the nation on a wartime footing to mobilize its entire resources. (This would include a decentralization and broadening of the Government so as to realize the full potential of all non-Communist elements in the country willing to contribute to the common struggle.)"

What was left in the above list, ^{were} are the administrative and organizational-type measures stressed in ^{the} CIP or in the military aspects of the Taylor Report. Beyond these, the Department now suggested merely:

"In addition we believe it essential for Diem to make moves which would, especially for international and American public opinion, symbolize the fact that bulk of Viet-Nameese people -- not merely 'Diem people' -- desire to maintain their independence. How this can best be done it not possible to specify in detail from here but it difficult to overemphasize its importance from Diem's point of view as well as our own. However, might it not be possible for Diem to put a friendly labor leader into some government position, release some political prisoners on selective basis, or to form or give increased substance to public consultative bodies?"

Thus, from the emphasis in Nolting's earlier discussions with Diem and Thuan on the necessity for political changes in Saigon to enlist broader Vietnamese support and thus to win the war, the Department's instructions were veering toward what had been a secondary reason in early guidance: The "public relations" need to reassure American domestic opinion. With this shift in the U.S. thinking ^{(see below),} ^{of toward} "essential interests," prospects were bound to improve for a meeting of minds. As of December 1, Nolting had little more to report than continued evidence of Diem's reluctance to make substantial political concessions whether to reassure the U.S. public or for any other reason.

"Marathon discussion with Diem this evening (Dec. 1) started on negative note, but improved over course of four hours to a point from which I think we may find meeting of our essential interests.....

"Diem did not retreat much from his basic conviction that Vietnamese conflict must be won by non-Communist Vietnamese nationalists and that American influence in his government, if publicly known, would be disadvantageous. On other hand, he expressed gratitude from President Kennedy's willingness to help, he realizes the reasons for our conditions, and I think we may find way to work out practical steps which will make increasing aid effective. However, pending further report, recommend nothing be made public other than that talks continuing, atmosphere was good throughout, but Diem evidently smarting under what he regards as unjustified criticism of him, his family, and his regime in certain sections US press."

(Saigon 748, December 1, 1961)

Summarizing his four-hour conversation with Diem, Ambassador Nolting reported that the discussion had centered around two broad headings:

(1) Measures to improve the efficiency of the Vietnamese Government in all fields, including the military; and

(2) Measures to improve the Vietnamese Government's public image at home and abroad.

The latter point reflected a considerable shift from the requirements and rationale analyzed in the President's statement of "general philosophy" accompanying ^{to} (Saigon 618) his initial instructions to Nolting. When the Ambassador continued to stress the U.S. requirement for a closer and more effective partnership

"....Diem's reply, in essence, was that he could not share the responsibility of governing South Vietnam with the United States, but that within that principle he too wanted to establish a closer and more effective partnership. On the question of broadening the base of his government, Diem was generally negative."

(State Research Project 630, p. 59)
(From Saigon, tel. 754, Dec 3, 1961, Secret)

Nolting subsequently incorporated the essential points agreed to during the discussion in a "memo of understanding," which Diem approved on 4 Dec 61.

"....This memorandum spelled out the measures the Vietnamese Government was prepared to take to increase its efficiency, including: reactivation of the National Internal Security Council; reorganization of the military command structure; acceptance of United States intelligence personnel in the Vietnamese intelligence operation; creation of a Border Ranger Force; conduct, with the United States, of joint surveys of the provinces; close military coordination of operations involving United States military units; and acceptance on a selective basis of United States advisers in certain Vietnamese Government administrative organs. With regard to winning public support at home and abroad, the memorandum (1) noted measures already taken or initiated by the Vietnamese Government, such as the

creation of a National Flood Relief and Rehabilitation Organization, of provincial councils, and of a National Economic Council and the preparation of plans for improved military allowances; and (2) listed additional measures to be taken, such as giving the people a broader sense of participation in the war effort, developing more contacts between officials and the people, developing a more effective public information service, and announcing an amnesty policy for Viet Cong defectors. The Ambassador thought that the memorandum represented "considerable headway" and believed that it justified the United States' 'moving confidently ahead.' (1)

"Although Diem had not gone as far as Washington would have liked in the matter of improving his public image, the Department told Ambassador Nolting, on December 4, that it agreed that the Memorandum of Understanding was a 'sufficient basis' upon which to proceed...." (2)

- (1) From (State Research Project 630, p. 60; summarized from
(Saigon, tel 756, Dec 4, 1961, Secret)
(2) To (Saigon, tel 725, Dec 4, 1961, Secret)

The measures, agreed to, which followed the list of "crucial elements" identified by the Department in the face of Diem's resistance to measures of liberalization, represented "headway" and a "sufficient basis" for agreement only on the premises that: (a) formal agreements, as distinct from effective implementation, represented significant progress; ~~an increasingly dubious assumption in the 7th year of our dealings with President Diem,~~ and (b) that the political measure^s on which Diem was so obturate ^{did} would not in fact really matter; contrary to the opinions expressed by the State Department in inputs to the Gilpatric Report, ^{and guidance to Donovan and Nolting;} the Rusk cable from Hakone, and the President's directive, and instructions to Nolting and background analysis of November. We had, in effect, come to agree that the problem of politics in Vietnam resolved to a problem of domestic politics in the US or "public image" which could be satisfied by the innocuous measures Diem was willing to take.

Agreement between Diem and the US was now attainable.

P The first formation of helicopters and personnel had^{arrived} in Saigon
 December
 December 11 on board the USS Core. On Washington instructions, Nolting^{asked}
 (the GVN to clear)
 to have all notifications to the ICC regarding the intervention of U.S.
 military personnel and war material. (Deptel ³⁰ from Saigon,
 tel-785, Dec 9, 1961, Secret; To Saigon, tel. 743, Dec 7, 1961; from
 Saigon, tel. 790, Dec 11, 1961, both Secret ^{actual} p. 62, State Dept Res. Proj
 630). On December 8th the State Department released a pamphlet entitled
A Threat to the Peace: North Viet-Nam's Effort to Conquer South Viet-Nam.

"...At his news conference on the day of its release,
 Secretary Rusk emphasized that the report documented the
 'elaborate program of subversion, terror and armed infiltration'
 carried on by the North Vietnamese regime, and that the pace of
 infiltration 'across the demilitarized zone, through Laos, and by sea,
 had been stepped up.' He stated that the documents showed 'clearly
 that the North Vietnamese Communists have repeatedly violated the
 Geneva Accords', and that Vietnam needed additional help to defend
 itself. He also stated that the United States was taking steps
 to help Vietnam 'develop the military, economic and social strength
 needed to preserve its national integrity.' In reply to a question
 as to whether the United States felt bound by the Geneva Accords,
 the Secretary said that the Accords had been 'systematically
 violated' by the North Vietnamese regime and that 'it is not a
 violation of an agreement of this sort to take steps to protect
 oneself against the other party's breach', and he added that 'if
 the North Vietnamese bring themselves into full compliance with
 the Geneva Accord, there will be no problem on the part of South
 Viet-Nam or anyone supporting South Viet-Nam.'

"Thus, although not specifically denouncing the Accords, the
 United States gave notice that, under the circumstances, it would
 not permit the limitations imposed by the Accords to stand in
 the way of the United States' furnishing additional support to
 the Republic of Vietnam in its struggle against North Vietnamese
 aggression and subversion."

(State Dept Res Proj 630, p. 64)

On December 7, Washington received the text of the letter Diem agreed to send to President Kennedy, which followed the draft request for assistance that had been suggested by Washington. President Kennedy's reply

"President Kennedy's reply stated that the United States was 'prepared to help the Republic of Viet-Nam to protect its people and to preserve its independence', and that 'if the Communist authorities in North Viet-Nam will stop their campaign to destroy the Republic of Viet-Nam, the measures we are taking to assist your defense efforts will no longer be necessary.'"

(State Dept Res Proj 630, p. 61)

The letters were released simultaneously at 4:00 a.m., December 16, 1961, Washington time.

How do the Presidential decisions and the rationales presented in cables 618 and 619 compare with the preceding State-Defense memo, the SecDef memo of 8 November, and the Taylor Report? ^PThe most prominent difference from the last two, of course, is the omission of the immediate deployment of U.S. combat forces to Vietnam. The reason for the rejection of this recommendation cannot be inferred conclusively from these two cables or, indeed, from other available evidence. The impression given in State 618 is that a sequential decision process was being ^{fast-tracked;} used; with combat forces not precluded for the future, but the decision on whether and when to send them being deferred for later information on "the GVN effort, including support from people, the Laotian situation, the Berlin crisis, readiness of allies for sharply increased tension with Bloc," and, in particular, on the reduction or increase of infiltration from the north. (para-2). ^PA more immediate factor bearing on the President's unwillingness to decide in favor of combat forces at this particular time seems to have been ^{the} its possible impact on a Laotian settlement (paragraphs 8 and 9, State 618). Secretary of State Rusk had discussed the question of assistance to Vietnam with British Ambassador Ormsby Gore on November 7 "at which time the latter explained that the British felt that the introduction of U.S. troops would not only complicate the situation but make it impossible to get anywhere on Laos" and observed the British were particularly concerned "about the question of timing between South Vietnam and Laos."

(Footnote: Memo of Conversation among the Secretary, Ormsby Gore, Bell and Steeds, November 7, 1961, files of S/S-S; cited in State Department Research Project No. 620, op. cit., Jan 65).

It seems plausible that British reservations on this score would have

had great weight with Kennedy, (considering especially his hopes for the Laos negotiations) in determining him against the commitment of troops at this particular time. (although the memo cited earlier by William Bundy noted the question -- raised by the State-Defense memo of 11 November, ^{and} but ^{still} left unsettled by the Presidential decisions on 14 November -- as to whether troops were ruled out until the final settlement in Laos should be reached; which could mean an indefinite postponement.)

Yet, if the ongoing Laos negotiations precluded the unsettling introduction of U.S. combat forces, the overall Laos situation had provoked the current pressures, both American and Vietnamese, for a strengthened U.S. commitment including combat forces. Both sides of this relationship appear in a discussion between Secretary Rusk and Ambassador Alphand of France on November 13 (to Saigon 600, November 13, 1961), a discussion which is, incidentally, the best indication available that the basic Presidential decisions reflected in the cables of 14 November had been ^{on or before that day} taken by 13 November.

"...Ambassador Alphand called on Secretary November 13 to discuss Viet-Nam in light Taylor mission.

"Secretary stated U.S. intended take measures - including increased economic aid, military assistance and U.S. logistic support - to enable Viet-Nam win its war and added Diem would have to delegate more authority. He said, in reply Alphand question, we not sending US combat forces, but this might later be necessary.

"Alphand raised Geneva negotiations, risk giving Soviets pretext mass intervention SVN and difficulties for West of fighting in Viet-Nam.

"Secretary replied large scale intervention now occurring, would be difficult for U.S. opinion and friendly countries accept a repetition of Laos in Viet-Nam. He continued by pointing out loss SEA more important to US than to Europe and concluded he hoped we could go along same path with European friends, but

if loss SEA at stake and Europeans did not agree with our policies, there might have to be divergence."

Thus, the President regarded it necessary to "avoid another Laos" -- while recognizing undoubtedly that it was precisely his current policy in Laos that had raised this question, (as the Taylor Report had informed him bluntly, SVN's "crisis of confidence" reflected in part "uncertainty about the seriousness of the American commitment to defend South Vietnam induced by the Laos negotiation," with many Vietnamese believing "that the U.S. will be prepared to settle for a Souvanna in Saigon"). ^{see} But at the same time the statement of "general philosophy" in State 618 ^{Sept 1} indicate^d that the President accepted the judgments of our allies, expressed by Alphand and Ormsby Gore, that the ~~enemy~~ introduction of U.S. forces would jeopardize the chances for agreement in Geneva. ^{PP} Similarly, questions of US relations with the Soviet Union worked both ways on the Presidential decisions of November 1961. Referring to these decisions, Arthur Schlesinger reports:

"Reflecting on the situation and reposing particular confidence in McNamara and Taylor, Kennedy prepared to go ahead. Moreover, given the truculence of Moscow, the Berlin crisis and the resumption of nuclear testing, the President unquestionably felt that an American retreat in Asia might upset the whole world balance...."

("A Thousand Days, John F. Kennedy in the White House, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1965, p. 548).

Yet, so far as combat forces were concerned, ^{gold} para 10, State 618 suggests ~~the need to watch~~ ^{that} the Berlin crisis and the attitude of our allies toward increased tension Bloc were considerations urging a deferment of this level of involvement. Likewise, notes on a meeting with Kennedy of 15 November 1961 begin with an indication that the

President had "expressed concern over a two-front war." (unsigned notes on a debriefing in the Office of the Chairman of the JCS, 1430 15 Nov 61). Richard Goodman (private interview) emphasizes this point as well; ^{he reports} that the President was concerned about the possibility that U.S. troops might ^{become} be involved fighting communist forces simultaneously in Vietnam and in Europe over Berlin.

^{State} State 618 goes beyond these short-run considerations to suggest-- though not definitively--some reasons for a strong reluctance to introduce U.S. combat forces into Vietnam even after a settlement ^{might} should be reached in Laos. Paras 1, 2, 6, 10, 11 indicate acceptance by the President of the emphasis in the State-Defense memo (in some contrast to the Taylor report and SecDef memo) on the absolutely critical role of the GVN, and the necessity for GVN reform and mobilization: a position consistent with the judgment of the State-Defense memo (and the Rusk cable from ^{Hanoi} Hanoi) that if the GVN did not become capable of mobilizing the Vietnamese efforts adequately, the war might be unwinnable even with U.S. troops; and that an immediate deployment of U.S. troops might actually work against this increased commitment by the Vietnamese. ^{Another} Another ^{Am} explicit Presidential statement on this point is reported by Schlesinger:

"The Taylor-Rostow report was a careful and thoughtful document, and the President read it with interest. He was impressed by its description of the situation as serious but not hopeless and attracted by the idea of stiffening the Diem regime through an infusion of American advisers. He did not, however, like the proposal of a direct American military commitment. 'They want a force of American troops,' he told me early in November. 'They say it's necessary in order to restore confidence and maintain morale. But it will be just like Berlin. The troops will march in; the bands will play; the crowds will cheer; and in four days everyone will have forgotten. Then we will be told we have to send in more troops. It's like taking a drink. The effect wears off, and you have to take another.' The war in Vietnam, he added, could be won only so long as it was their war. 'If it were ever converted into a white man's war, we would lose as the French had lost a decade earlier.'"

(Ibid., p. 547)

Hillsman and Sorenson make similar comments on the President's attitude. [cite] Hillsman describes the President's directive to the DOD to prepare plans for the later introduction of combat forces as a bureaucratic gambit to cover the actual shelving of the proposal; *but* the language of the final para of State 618 makes ^{the} Presidential intention ^{in this respect} here clear enough: "objective of our policy is to do all possible to accomplish purpose without use of US combat forces," ^{likewise,} while the indication of reluctance to shift primary responsibility of SVN to the U.S. government in para 11 is strong support for the Schlesinger interpretation cited above.

On the issue of the necessity for undertakings by the GVN, on the political and administrative fronts, to match the increased effort by the U.S., the Presidential decisions clearly followed the emphasis in the State cables and State-Defense memo rather than the Taylor discussions or Report, or the SECDEF memo. A willingness to use U.S. offers of increased aid as bargaining counters to achieve such ^{undertakings} changes by the GVN reveals ~~a sense of the critical urgency of such change and a~~ sense of priorities, ^(and of the urgency of such changes) that would make the withholding or postponement of U.S. aid reasonable in the absence of GVN responsiveness, that is absent or muted in the DOD analysis. (However, the notion that the U.S. sought a ^{with Taylor} "partnership" with the GVN did, of course, reflect the Taylor mission report.) ^{It} might be noted that a somewhat different rationale for this emphasis ^{from that} in State 618 is indicated in the cable of instructions to Nolting (State 619), which suggests (para 3) that "real administrative, political and social reforms and a real effort to ~~win the space~~" was essential in particular in order to "give maximum confidence to the American people, as well as to world

opinion that our efforts are not directed towards the support of an unpopular or ineffective regime." Taylor's discussions with Diem seemed to indicate a similar emphasis on the "public relations" or domestic political requirement for such changes, rather than their practical necessity to assure success of the joint efforts within SVN. Over the whole period of our relations with Diem, Washington guidance to the U.S. Mission in Saigon revealed some ambivalence and fluctuation between these two points of view on the importance ^{much for} of "reforms" by Diem. ~~This~~ ^{The belief} ~~state-of-mind~~ ^{that} regarding such reforms ^{was} as necessary more to reassure the U.S. public ~~rather~~ ^{rather} than to win the war in Vietnam (or even, that regarded ~~the forms as counterproductive~~ ^{"reforms" as} with respect to the war) posing a "dilemma," ~~as indicated in the August 61 NIE~~) led more readily to acceptance of GVN refusal to carry out such reforms, whereas ^{the} attitude expressed in ^{State} 618 and supported by Rusk's Hakone cable pointed rather to withdrawing U.S. commitment from a hopeless situation in the event ~~that~~ ^{if} the GVN should ~~be recalcitrant~~ ^{recalcitrance} in this area.

The National Security Council discussed U.S. Policy Toward Vietnam on November 15 (State Department Research Project 630, op.cit., p. 55); from the evidence available, it would appear that this formal discussion (as not infrequently happened) came after the President's decisions of 13 November, already expressed in directives and background cables drafted in State 14 November 1961. (IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THESE DRAFTS WERE DISCUSSED AT 15 NOVEMBER MEETING AND NOT SENT OUT UNTIL AFTER THE MEETING; THIS POINT NEEDS CLEARING UP). Notes on this meeting based on a debriefing in the office of the Chairman of the JCS, 1430, 15 November 1961 ^{to} the extent that they can be relied upon, ^{provide} provide valuable insight into concerns in the President's mind at this juncture.

"Pres expressed concern over 2-front war.

"Another bother him, no overt Chicom aggression in SVN, unlike Korea; these Diem's own people; difficult operating area. If go beyond advisers need other nations with us.

"Rusk critical decision made Indochina 1953; also backing Phoumi. Inferred bad

"Pres receiving static from Congress; they against using US troops

"Rusk: British pulling away from SEA

"Pres asked why important to retain SVN & Laos. Chairman: we would lose Asia all the way Singapore. Serious setback to US & FW. Pointed out these actions would help, not solve the problem.

"Someone suggested bombing Hanoi or attacking NVN. These actions in SVN. Used to muddy the water

"Pres asked Rusk. Why do we take onus, say we are going to break Geneva accords (in letter to Diem). Why not remain silent. Don't say this ourselves. Directed State to reword letter (para 4a)

"Chairman, why can't we take slots French had in '54. J5 to take this. We are making mountain out of molehill. ICC helpless, hopeless & useless.

"Must keep mil movements secret or use cover. //underlined//

"Jordan Rpt, discussed which first, this or Diem letter. concurrent.

"Pres, who is going to support US if we go in there? Upset when told UK informal support. Wants public agreement with allied countries. State has task.

"Gen Taylor: 1. Build up GVN morale, US forces
2. Clean out VC

"Use next 2-3 weeks to determine allies position (if we go in)

"Chairman, go ahead with planning as we have it here

"Pres asked why we can't move another div to West Pac. Chman, no place to move another div at present.

"No decisions.

"Core can go, can't offload.

"Cmd structure not discussed."